dent. The inference that they reported on Watergate and may well have received instructions is almost irresistible." Another inference flowed immediately from the revelation: No claim of Richard Nixon's had been more strenuous than that the tapes were under "my sole personal control." So didn't that make the gap his sole personal responsibility? The prosecution team, now under the direction of a new special prosecutor, Leon Jaworski, got to work investigating whether the president had *personally* destroyed evidence of criminal wrongdoing. Earthquake upon earthquake: this was Watergate now.

The prosecution put forward a female lawyer, Jill Wine Volner, to question the scandal's latest, unlikely, protagonist: Rose Mary Woods, Richard Nixon's personal secretary since 1951. On November 8, Judge Sirica asked her whether it was possible to accidentally erase a tape. She replied, "I don't think I'm so stupid as to erase what's on a tape." Now, under rapid-fire questioning from Volner, she offered a convoluted, contradictory tale of how she had done exactly that—one involving foot pedals, push buttons, an unexpected phone call, and a long bodily stretch. Investigators and news photographs then found themselves assembled in her White House office for a demonstration of the push-button-and-foot-pedal stretch in question. But during the demonstration, she *couldn't* push down the pedal and the button at the same time. She had to have been lying.

Newsweek's next cover: "Rose Mary's Boo Boo." You soon could buy the image on a souvenir silver ingot, comically embossed, "18 Minutes of Hum Along with Dick and Bob 1973," to add to your expanding collection of Watergate kitsch—which also now included an eight-track tape starring eighteen and a half minutes of silence, "Sealed in a 'perfectly clear' plastic case for all to see."

IN RHODE ISLAND, A PRIZE HIGH SCHOOL COMPOSITION WAS CUSTOMARily chosen to be signed by the governor as the official state Thanksgiving proclamation. The governor refused to sign this year's winner, in which a seventeen-year-old wrote, "Thanksgiving seems to be pretended, a farce, little more than an outdated tradition no one has yet found time to discard." *Time*'s Thanksgiving cover had Archie Bunker in his trademark easy chair, stalactites of frost hanging from his cigar and winter cap—he couldn't afford home heating oil. *Newsweek*'s featured a freezing Uncle Sam holding an empty cornucopia and the legend "Running Out of Everything." Jesse Jackson said, "When the energy crisis is exposed as the hoax it is, it will be bigger than Watergate." Adding to the sticky precipitate of national dread was an issue that was supposed to be

dead and buried: Vietnam. Governor Reagan, in Singapore as a special presidential representative for a trade deal, said North Vietnam must "return" the POWs and MIAs supposedly still being held, and that if it didn't, "bombing should be resumed." He accused liberals in Congress of taking away "the power to sway those monkeys over there to straighten up and follow through on the deal."

A coffee table book, *They Could Not Trust the King*, with text by William Shannon of the *New York Times* editorial board, went to press. It called Watergate "a complex and far-reaching political plan that could serve as dress rehearsal for an American fascist coup d'etat." In Memphis, Nixon addressed governors for an "Operation Candor" meeting where, one of the governors leaked, he had reassured them that no Watergate bombshells were imminent and that all seven extant subpoenaed tapes were "audible"—even as he knew about the eighteen-and-a-half-minute gap. A court-appointed scientific panel ruled with virtual certainty that the erasure had to have been deliberate.

Senator Jackson opened hearings investigating the energy crisis with an accusation: "For the major oil companies," he said, "the shortages were good business." He said the White House knew the crisis was coming and did nothing, in order to help his friends' bottom lines. Plastic bags, made with petroleum, became prohibitively expensive; petrochemicals were also ingredients in many lifesaving drugs—so pharmaceutical executives projected a shortage. Twenty-five New Hampshire towns suspended police, fire protection, garbage pickups, road repair, and school transportation. The mayor of Rensselaer, Indiana, turned off the city's 425 streetlights, until a rash of burglaries forced him to turn them on again. In an interview he revealed his motives as less than Christian: "If everyone in the country would make this kind of effort, we could tell the Arabs to go to hell."

Unchristian motives were everywhere. A gas station owner stopped letting drivers of big cars buy more than a dollar of gas at a time—"just enough to keep them off the road." People started driving with a full can of gas in the trunk, which turned their cars into inadvertent firebombs. The Senate came within eight votes of passing a law rationing gasoline.

Then December, and the presidentially mandated closing of service stations from Saturday evening until Monday morning. A Hanford, California, gas station owner shot up six of the pumps of a rival who stayed open across the street. A Miami man yelled to a gas station attendant who wouldn't sell to him on a Saturday night, "I am going to get some gas even if I have to kill somebody"—and then, waving a pistol, almost honored his pledge. Auto supply houses ran out of siphons, tools

for the new street crime of choice, and locks for gas caps. Amid reports of gas going at some stations for 99.9 cents a gallon, more ambitious crooks started hijacking petroleum trucks. Brooklyn motorists filled up with "Gambinoil"—oil the Gambino crime family stole from industrial oil tanks and sold to area dealers at 70 percent more than legitimate distributors. But who were the real mafiosi? "I hear about organized crime," a citizen wrote to the *Berkshire Eagle* in Massachusetts, "but has anyone tried to find out why these same companies are responsible for organized famine, organized monopolies, organized profiteering?... I'm an avid supporter of free enterprise, but what the oil companies are doing isn't free enterprise; it's free back-stabbing aimed at the public." The newspapers reported oil tankers stacked twenty deep at U.S ports waiting—a kind of maritime arbitrage, the suspicious circles imagined, all the better to produce a false shortage, then make a killing once the price became high enough to unload them.

The Senate Subcommittee on Intergovernmental Relations released a poll indicating that 55 percent of Americans felt "alienated and disenchanted," compared with 29 percent in 1966. On the bright side: Gerald Ford replaced Spiro Agnew, and gave a stirring inaugural address. "In exactly eight weeks," he said, "we have demonstrated to the world that our great republic stands solid." In other good news, *Time* magazine pointed out that the gas crisis made it harder for people to abandon their families. And Ronald Reagan told reporters at the Southern Republican Conference in Atlanta that the "average citizen," by his own private initiative, could solve the energy crisis himself "by turning off the lights as he goes through different rooms to go into the den and watch television."

Outside, the protesters held up signs reading, for example, DIG UP THE BODIES IN THE WHITE HOUSE LAWN.

And then it was Christmastime, when darkness literally descended.

THE IDEA HAD BEEN PIONEERED BY NO LESS AN INSTITUTION THAN THE Norman Rockwellian Sears, Roebuck. Already, custodians in Sears's hometown, Chicago, were cleaning offices by flashlight. The public safety committee of the Milwaukee Common Council held an evening meeting by candlelight. New York banned outdoor store lighting after 9:30 P.M. So why not suspend energy-wasting yuletide illumination? It seemed only the patriotic thing to do.

A lead editorial in the *Los Angeles Times* proposed readers voluntarily forgo "decorative fountains, waterfalls, and related décor," "outdoor security lighting during daylight," and "outdoor Christmas

decorations.... And even a small reduction in the number of lights on indoor Christmas trees would save some of our limited electricity." The city obliged, passing an ordinance surpassing even the restrictions during World War II. Officials said they had no choice—for the Department of Water and Power had contracted for 48 percent of the city's power supply from Arab nations: the sheikhs who stole Christmas. Across the country, the *New York Times* headlined "LOS ANGELES A SHADOW OF ITS USUAL RADIANT SELF."

A letter writer from Whittier, California, proposed a moratorium on energy-wasting Christmas cards. Reno, Nevada, decided to extinguish an "eternal flame" lit with fanfare back in March by a returned Vietnam prisoner of war to honor veterans. Others debated whether the eternal flame that burned at the grave of President Kennedy in Arlington National Cemetery ought to be doused. The 2,200 cubic feet of natural gas it used a month cost $37. "Wouldn't it seem logical," a newspaper letter writer asked, "to use that gas for a better use such as heating homes or office buildings rather than just burning it for no real purpose whatever?" However, another correspondent called that heresy: "In this time of widespread public distrust for many of our political leaders, it is common to hear the statement, 'all politicians are crooks.' But to this I answer, 'But that's not true. I remember John Kennedy.' He was loved and trusted by the nation he led. He set high ideals for that nation to live up to, and he gave it great challenges to face."

That seemed so very long ago. On the cover of *Time*, a flaxen-haired boy who looked as if the bogeyman had just stolen his teddy bear. The accompanying article, "A Child's Christmas in America," began with vignettes:

"In St. Louis, ten-year-olds suit up for karate class.... 'Gonna teach 'em not to rip me off,' murmurs a disciple. 'Like *A Clockwork Orange*.'

"In Brooklyn, a boy scarcely old enough to go to school composes a graffito with a spray can against a handball court. The word: NIXON—with the X in the form of a swastika.

"In Anaheim, Calif., a group of preschoolers ponder the wonders of Disneyland. 'I'm going to live here when I grow up,' one of them vows. Why? 'Not a pollution anywhere.'"

Hijackers from the Palestinian group Black September set fire to a Pan Am jetliner in Rome, killed thirty people, then threatened to crash another flight into the center of Athens. The POWs showed up in the news again around Christmastime, in a cavalcade of stories about their high divorce rate. One wife described her husband's homecoming in *McCall's*. He couldn't accept that she had voted for George McGovern.

By the end of March, she wrote, she was "on the verge of tears all the time" and "ready to can the whole thing." John McCain gave an interview in *U.S. News* debunking the emerging narrative of the inevitable breakdown of the POWs' marriages: "Let me emphasize that there were many, many fine women who supported what they knew their husbands believed in. My wife, Carol, was one of those, and I'm very proud of her."

Merle Haggard, the felonious White House guest from March, sang a new hit song: "If We Make It Through December." And on Christmas Eve, OPEC unilaterally raised the price of crude, this time by a factor of four. Gas went up to fifty-five cents a gallon, gas lines up to as long as four hours. Richard Nixon's new "energy czar," William Simon, announced a mandatory emergency fuel allocation program that would provide for 20 percent less gas than currently demanded.

And alone among prominent public officials, Ronald Reagan said such "redundant, unclear, and contradictory rules" were not necessary at all.

CHAPTER TEN

"That Thing Upstairs Isn't My Daughter"

THE NEW YORK CITY WINTER TURNED FIERCE FOR THE NEW YEAR, BUT people were still willing to wait in lines up to four hours long for tickets to a new hit movie—and then wait again to see it a second and third time. People started paying scalpers fifty bucks to get in. "It's like a cult," a theater manager said. "People must see it."

The Exorcist begins in the desert sands of the mysterious Middle East, where wicked oil sheikhs live. Cut to Georgetown, where wicked politicians live. There we meet Christine MacNeil, played by Ellen Burstyn. Christine is a liberal Hollywood movie actress, perhaps an atheist, perhaps based on George McGovern campaign volunteer Shirley MacLaine, who is starring in a movie about left-wing student radicals, and who may or may not be having an affair with her director. Her fascination is piqued by a liberal priest she accidentally encounters, Father Karras, who is also a psychiatrist, frequents singles bars, and suffers from an awful, soul-crushing alienation: "There's not a day in my life when I don't feel like a fraud," he says.

The condensation point for all the demonic energies circling around this broken society is a twelve-year-old girl, the actress's daughter, cute little Regan, played by a newcomer named Linda Blair. The devil is struggling to possess her, and wins. She shrieks and snarls, vomits—and murders a priest. Her head spins around 360 degrees. And, in a shot that might have been the most mind-blowing to yet appear in the entire history of cinema, she shouts like a deep, dark, guttural flamethrower, "*LET JESUS FUCK YOU! LICK ME! LICK ME!*" while shoving a crucifix between her twelve-year-old labia.

When scenes like these unspooled on the movie screen, unbelievable things started happening. At the first press screening in New York a woman in the sixth row started pacing the aisle, holding her head and murmuring, "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus." When *The Exorcist* opened in Los Angeles, a theater manager counted an average of six vomiters and six fainters per showing. Exhibitors started stocking up

on, of all things, kitty litter; it helped absorb the puke. A guard at the Manhattan theater told reporters about all the heart attacks and miscarriages he had witnessed.

Warner Bros. had thought the film's commercial prospects unpredictable at best—religious pictures didn't do well in these allegedly faithless times. *The Exorcist* opened in twenty-six theaters. As word of mouth spread, the studio struck new prints as quickly as possible—and in each new city, emergency room visits skyrocketed. In Boston the audience assaulted the image with rosary beads. In San Francisco a patron charged the screen. In Germany a boy shot himself in the head after a screening; in England a boy died of an epileptic seizure. In Chicago six people ended up in psychiatric wards, convinced demons had come to possess them, too; others showed up at rectories with their little ones in tow, begging for exorcisms.

Which of course only made people want to see it more. Within two months of its release *Variety* reported it was the fifth-highest-grossing film in history.

Why? What was the awesome appeal? Some of it was surely the shocking physicality of what showed up on the screen—like the arc of pea-green vomit Regan sends soaring into a startled priest's eye. Some of it was old-fashioned marketing genius. Publicists let it be known that director William Friedkin had seen five hundred aspirants for the role of the little girl who would be doing such awful things onscreen. They trumpeted the awful coincidences alleged to be haunting the production.

Beyond all that, the fact was this: within the relatively safe confines of a darkened, popcorn-scented hall, it is fun to be haunted. And yet, there were dozens of movies entering theaters that year that aimed to haunt. But only this one was sending patrons to the emergency room. Why?

Aristotle was the first writer to try to explain why it is pleasing to be horrified in a theater. A tragic story, he said, "has pain as its mother." Displaying that pain, containing it—"arousing these emotions through the representation of them"—storytelling thereby reduces it; viewers, he wrote, "settle down as if they have attained healing." The Greek word for this, *catharsis*, came from a medical term: "cleansing," "purification," or, more dramatically, *purgation*.

What was it that *The Exorcist* purged? What were the social pains that were its mother? Here was one: our actual little girls, our perfect symbols of innocence, had become alien and frightening. Take for example the real Linda Blair, the fourteen-year-old who beat out five hundred other aspirants to play the demon-filled Regan. The director had asked her if she knew what the movie was to be about. Because she had read the book, she reported, she did: "It's about a little girl who gets possessed by the devil and does a lot of bad things."

"What sort of bad things?"

"She pushes a guy out a window and masturbates with a crucifix—"

"What does that mean?"

"It's like jerking off, isn't it?"

"Yeah, do you know about jerking off?"

"Oh, sure."

"Do you do that?"

"Yeah, don't you?"

Here was another 1974 pain to be purged: the fear that someone you loved would disappear. A Missouri bank president and his wife disappeared, then were discovered shot to death, trussed to a tree, the banker with dynamite strapped to his chest. The editor of the *Atlanta Constitution* disappeared, kidnapped by individuals claiming to be members of an "American Revolutionary Army" seeking "to return the American government to the people." An IRS agent in Wisconsin was lured out to a farm, tied up, and threatened by right-wing extremists of the new "Posse Comitatus" movement, which pledged massive tax resistance against the United States.

Young people disappeared. A typical news report, from California: "The nude body of a young woman found in a desert wash near Blythe was tentatively identified as that of Laura Louise Escamillo, 20, of Idyllwild, sheriff's detectives reported. Officers said Miss Escamillo was last seen July 11 near Blythe attempting to hitch a ride home." In August, a pit full of decomposing corpses, most of them teenage runaways, was discovered outside Houston; the serial killer, Dean Arnold Corll, who had once owned a candy shop, lured them in with promises of drugs, food, and shelter. He piled up a final toll of twenty-seven corpses.

Sometimes, and even more frighteningly, children made *themselves* disappear. They ran away. They became willing captives to strange Svengalis and gurus, their personalities suddenly changed—or of a sudden it seemed they had no personalities at all. Like the onetime cheerleaders who joined the "Manson Family" and became obedient mass murderers. Or the bright college students discovered by their parents selling flowers on a street corner on behalf of the Reverend Sun Myung Moon (whose favorite movie was *The Exorcist*). Their parents, *Time* noted, "almost uniformly describe their children as having been well-rounded, industrious, and studious until they went off to college and became captured by drugs and radicalism." Steve Allen, the TV personality,

discovered that his missing son had joined the "Love Israel" cult and now went by the name "Logic." In Houston in November 1973, a city traumatized by the Corll killings, tens of thousands gathered over three days in the Astrodome to celebrate the fifteen-year-old guru Maharaji Ji. As the scoreboard flashed HOLY BREATH WILL FILL THIS PLACE AND YOU WILL BE BAPTIZED IN HOLY BREATH, like some of the lines from the *Exorcist* script, his agents combed the aisles to recruit devotees willing to live a life of total regimentation on his ashrams, give up all their worldly goods, and never speak to their families again—in exchange for the promise of levitation and communion with extraterrestrials.

Then there were the children disappearing into lives of drug-filled dissolution, making of it some sort of moral rebuke to "the system." John Paul Getty III, heir to the great oil fortune, appeared to have done just that—then his mother started getting ransom notes for millions of dollars with the threat that unless they were paid "he will arrive in little pieces." Just before Christmas he turned up at a truck stop outside Naples, Italy, missing an ear. His grandfather refused to talk to him when his heir called to thank him for putting up the ransom; the elder Getty apparently believed he had got what he had deserved—one more child possessed by demons, unrecognizable to his family.

A national hotline opened, "Operation Peace of Mind," advertised with a poster of a scruffy-haired hitchhiking teenage boy. His sign said "Anywhere," and the caption read: *"Are you still alive? Let somebody know."* The massage parlors beloved by journalist Gay Talese were largely staffed by such runaways, as were the Times Square peep shows and whorehouses—like the one out of whose tenth-floor window a twelve-year-old named Veronica Brunson fell, or was pushed. "One wonders what a modern version of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* would be like, or even if it would be permitted reading in our nation's high schools," Indiana senator Birch Bayh, whose son Evan was seventeen, reflected at a hearing on his proposed Runaway Youth Act.

THE NINETEEN-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER OF RANDOLPH HEARST, SON OF THE founder of the newspaper empire fictionalized in *Citizen Kane*, disappeared February 4. She was sitting at home in her bathrobe in Berkeley, where she was a sophomore, in the apartment she shared with her boyfriend, a cohabitation unthinkable among respectable people only a few years before. Two armed men pushed in, struck her in the face with a rifle butt, and forced her into the trunk of a car. No news was forthcoming for a couple of days; and then a "military communique" arrived in the mail at the radical Bay Area radio station KPFA from the abductors,

announcing they had served a "warrant" from the "Court of the People" to arrest the child of a "corporate enemy of the people," and that "all communications from this court must be published in full, in all newspapers, and all other forms of media. Failure to do so will endanger the safety of the prisoner," and in the event of a rescue attempt, "the prisoner is to be executed." The next communiqué promised future abductions, in order to finance "war against the establishment." It concluded: "Death to the fascist insect that preys upon the life of the people."

The kidnappers came from something called the "Symbionese Liberation Army"—which had recently claimed responsibility for the assassination of the black superintendent of the Oakland school system, whom they called the "black Judas of Oakland." Two SLA members were soon arrested—but others found easy shelter within Berkeley's radical underground.

A cassette tape arrived at KPFA on February 11 bearing Patricia Hearst's voice. Wearily, she informed "mom and dad" that she was "not being starved or beaten or unnecessarily frightened." She urged her parents to cooperate with the demands of what she called the "combat unit," assuring them, "They are not just a bunch of nuts and have been very honest with me." Officials pointed out that the recording appeared to have been stopped and started several times, suggesting she had been fed what to say; others, however, noting rumors that her boyfriend, Steven Weed, had been a member of Students for a Democratic Society, detected suspicious gestures of sympathy toward her captors. A man who identified himself as "Cinque," the SLA's "general field marshal," pronounced in a calm, clear voice, "I am not a savage killer and madman, we do hold a high moral value to life, but I am quite willing to carry out the execution of your daughter to save starving men, women, and children of every race." His "preliminary demands" were for Randolph Hearst to oversee the distribution of seventy dollars' worth of groceries to every Californian eligible for any form of public assistance and anyone who had ever been in prison or on parole—an outlay of $147 million by one estimate, $400 million by another. "If you do not meet these demands in good faith we will assume there is no basis for negotiations and we will no longer maintain in good health prisoners of war," the document concluded, demanding the SLA's emblem, a seven-headed snake, be printed in all the newspapers.

Placards of solidarity showed up on Bay Area lawns: GOD BLESS YOU, PATTY HEARST. Three mornings later, the fascist insect who preyed upon the life of the people, Patty's dad, stepped up to a bank of microphones and addressed his daughter directly—"Patty, I hope you're

listening!"—and said that while meeting the SLA's demands as specified would be impossible, he was preparing "some kind of counteroffer that's acceptable." Randolph Hearst continued, struggling to compose himself: "Tell them not to worry. Nobody's going to bust in on them to start a shootout. You take care of yourself. We love you, Patty." He turned away, unable to continue. His wife, Catherine, a member of Ronald Reagan's conservative bloc on the University of California Board of Regents, sobbing beside him and clasping his hand, took over: "We love you, Patty, and we're all praying for you. I'm sorry I'm crying, but I'm happy you're safe and strong." She was sure, she said, that the captors had "good ideals," but "just went about it the wrong way."

"God bless you, honey. Take care of yourself."

British journalist Alistair Cooke, one of those European Tocquevilles who are better able to see us than we can see ourselves, begged his British readers' indulgence of the extreme indignity of parents negotiating with moral monsters over TV: "We were hearing a girl zombie apparently drained of all feeling except that of a beggar; and we were identifying, in a helpless way, with the sleepless anxiety of a mother and father at the end of their rope."

THOSE IMAGES ON THE NEWS HAD BECOME A NUMBINGLY FAMILIAR: exhausted, gaunt, mystified parents, helpless against the demons who had stolen their child—a reason *The Exorcist* signified so heavily. And though it couldn't have been more different from the previous summer's surprise movie hit, *American Graffiti*, it also could not have been more the same. Both ended by strenuously maintaining that the world would have turned out just fine, had we just stayed in 1962.

The Exorcist's turning point came as the gaunt, frantic mother begs Father Karras, the faithless priest, to look into performing the ancient and mysterious rite of exorcism. Science, after all, has been helpless to explain her daughter's mysterious possession. Father Karras, a man of science, tells her that she is being ridiculous and that her daughter . . . but the mother interrupts:

"I'm telling you that thing upstairs isn't my daughter!"

Like the real-life middle-class Angelenos flocking to the downtown branch of State Savings Mutual Bank to embrace the healing powers of astrology, numerology, palmistry, tarot, and the comet Kohoutek, reason and progress having failed to deliver us from evil, why not embrace mystical solutions instead? And so, in the movie's dramatic final fifteen-minute set piece, ministrations of holy water, prayers declaimed in Latin, the simple profession that Satan is one and indivisible and perfectly, obviously evil, but that God is one and indivisible and perfectly good, together restore the innocent little girl to herself—and, incidentally, restore Father Karras's faith as well. Evil abated. Order restored.

The 1970s abated, too. In the last scene, the mother replaces the loose, flowing earth-toned slacks of earlier reels (*unisex: remember that word*) with a Jacqueline Kennedy–style tailored pink dress, long white gloves, and a fur hat and coat. Regan is presented in an old-fashioned coat of red, white, and blue. "She doesn't remember any of it," the mother tells a priest, and stares dreamily at his Roman collar, and then, as if instinctively, throws her arm around him in loving gratitude.

Just as in *American Graffiti* it was 1962 again, the time before the storm, before children disappeared.

AMERICANS NOW LONGED FOR INTIMATIONS OF INNOCENCE WHEREVER they could find them—even from that most degraded class of citizen: the politician.

The demon in the White House delivered his State of the Union address on January 30, 1974, pledging neither to resign nor to compromise the presidency by giving up more tapes and documents. (Once more the governor of California was about the only prominent figure to defend him: "Any President would resign if in his own mind he believed it would be for the good of the country to do so," he said on *Meet the Press*, then dismissed the latest news of more missing tape segments: "I certainly don't feel like I'm qualified to sit . . . from 3,000 miles away and try to tell lawyers before a judge how to conduct that case.")

Nixon spoke nine days after his "energy czar" published plans for a nationwide "contingency rationing plan," variable from month to month according to available supplies. "Under the plan," the *New York Times* reported, "all licensed drivers at least 18 years old would receive coupons, which are being prepared by the Bureau of Printing and Engraving"; the White House had ordered more than 10 billion of them. Present projections were that "eligible drivers" in New York and its suburbs would be entitled to thirty-seven gallons a month. "There is nothing," an official admitted, "to keep anyone from going into the coupon buying-and-selling business": black-market America, like Casablanca during the war. Czar Simon then announced he might mandate a three-dollar minimum purchase—to prevent the very panic buying his previous announcements had engendered. Next, on February 4, Gulf Oil closed its terminal in Linden, New Jersey, for fear that picketing truckers would attack the employees or sabotage the facility—engendering more panic anew.

In Washington the harried president's lawyer James St. Clair argued that the prosecution of his client had become a persecution. Jaworski came back that this was nonsense—and that subpoenas of people at the White House might once more be forthcoming. A subpoena from another judge was already in the works, ordering Nixon's testimony in the trial of John Ehrlichman for ordering the burglary of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist. ("Watergate West," the trial was nicknamed.) It was the first subpoena to a president by a state judge in the history of the United States. The White House said it would ignore it.

Then, on February 5, a forty-one-year-old Democratic state legislator named John Murtha won a special election to Congress in a rural district in Pennsylvania that had sent only Republicans to Washington for the last thirty years. Nearly the only Republican who didn't seem worried about the omen was Ronald Reagan—traveling the country so aggressively that an aide's memo plotting a potential presidential campaign strategy warned, "The Governor must look to the public as if he still cares about California." At a Lincoln Day dinner in Oklahoma City, Reagan roused the troops by insisting that it was the *Democrats* who should be under the microscope for corruption: "We in our party have too often been the victim of big city political machines voting tombstones, warehouses and county lots against us in every election." The ensuing ovation was ecstatic.

In a week, Michigan's Fifth District was to pick a replacement for Vice President Gerald Ford; he had been elected thirteen times with never less than 60 percent of the vote, and no Democrat had served in the Fifth District since 1910. The Democrat now running insisted Watergate was almost the only issue that mattered. "This country and this district cannot continue to survive so long as the moral and leadership vacuum exists in Washington," soft-spoken Richard Vander Veen said in announcing his candidacy. "Our constitution provides no equivalent to the British vote of no confidence," he said, "and my campaign could be just that—a referendum on Richard Nixon." He also said Nixon had to resign—and that if the president didn't, he would go to Washington to work for impeachment.

Vander Veen was a peculiar kind of Democrat—one apparently indifferent to being a Democrat at all. He spoke rarely if at all about the New Deal accomplishments upon which the party of Jefferson and Jackson had been winning elections for a generation. He took as his model instead George Romney, the Republican governor who had entered public life by fielding a nonpartisan citizens' commission to reform the Michigan constitution. He had imagined the previous year that a similar commission might help heal the entire mess in Washington itself. "We could style ourselves as Democrats or independents," he wrote; it didn't matter which; his and Ford's own Kent County had gone to ruin precisely because the only people allowed to run for office were those willing to "pledge their souls to the party store." Watergate, he thought, was caused by an excess of partisanship, and wasn't *really* the fault of Republicans at all: "Democrats can take an equal share of the blame for failing to present the country a candidate of sufficiently broad base in the presidential election of 1972."

The worst thing he would say about his Republican opponent, the head of the state senate, who had never lost an election in fifteen tries, was that he was a "career politician." (Vander Veen had never held elected office.) He had an ironclad policy of never speaking ill of a political foe; Gerald Ford, Vander Veen said in a hapless run against him in 1958, was "a fine fellow." For America needed politicians who were not politicians—who had "proven themselves to be successful in an honorable line of endeavor other than politics," one who "has a code of moral values and has demonstrated a capacity to adhere to . . . values." (Vander Veen was a corporate lawyer by trade, but his real passion was collecting rare books.) "I am a lifelong Democrat, and I have not always agreed with Gerald Ford on the issues," he said on the stump. But the vice president's integrity and reputation were beyond question, and that was the important thing: "We need Gerald Ford as President."

This was just the sort of antipolitician, it turned out, Americans longed for to effect their political deliverance.

The special election arrived on February 18—the same day as the start of the trial of John Mitchell and Maurice Stans for hoovering up $200,000 of Robert Vesco's cash, and the same day Richard Nixon engaged his own impassioned form of bipartisanship as a guest of Alabama governor George Wallace before forty thousand enthusiastic fans at "Honor America Day" in Huntsville, Alabama. "We in Alabama have always honored the office of the Presidency of the United States," the governor intoned from his wheelchair, a remarkable lie (he had made his political reputation by daring President Kennedy to send troops to Alabama to enforce federal law). The president said thanks to "you all" for "reminding all of us that here in the heart of Dixie, the heart of America is good and we are going to continue to be a great nation." Enthusiasts waved signs like the one with a picture of Abraham Lincoln and the legend, WHAT IF HE HAD QUIT? (once upon a time, Alabamans had dearly hoped he would), and another enjoining, REBELS SAY "HANG IN THERE" MR. P!

Energy czar William Simon was busy meting out fuel supplies state

by state from Washington—more like a Soviet commissar: he dictated prices down to a penny, and when he announced that 90 percent of the nation's gas stations now had permission to raise prices an extra two cents a gallon, they dropped threats of a nationwide gas-station shutdown. But truckers barricaded freeways to protest skyrocketing operating costs: 350 rigs backed up traffic for twelve miles in the crucial Philadelphia-to-Wilmington corridor; the Ohio Turnpike was virtually motionless for twenty-four hours. Then independent carriers went on a wildcat strike, leaving the same arteries virtually deserted. Truckers who scabbed risked having bricks hurled down at them from overpasses; in Delaware, one was shot to death. "In no instance will we tolerate violence from those with grievances," the president said in a national radio address on that particular crisis, and pleaded for calm, adding that "despite the threat of violence from a handful of desperadoes, at least 80 percent of the nation's truckers stayed on the job."

Also on the highways, the "Honk for Impeachment" movement spread ("I even got a cop to honk," an enthusiast told a Michigan newspaper). Nixon's approval rating was a record-low 25 percent. And in Grand Rapids, the same citizens who had returned Gerald Ford to Congress thirteen times voted in their mild-mannered book collecting neighbor with 53,008 votes to 45,159. The sweating, celebrating crowds chanting "Nixon Must Go!" at Eastern Avenue Hall before the national and international news cameras stamped so hard, authorities feared the floor might collapse.

Maybe that flawed vessel the Democratic Party could save us after all. A book called *Plain Speaking*, composed of interviews a journalist named Merle Miller had done with the thirty-fourth president for an early 1960s TV special that never aired, was the year's runaway best-seller. Harry S. Truman, who had died in December 1972, was drafted from beyond the grave as the exorcist of the nation's Nixon demons. "There was not a duplicitous bone in his body," Miller wrote. He wore shirts "that could have come from J.C. Penney." "As nearly as he could remember," his "last act in the White House was returning a pencil or maybe it was a pen to the desk of the man he borrowed it from." (He was not a crook.) The first thing he did upon returning home after his presidential term, back at the old house at 219 North Delaware in Independence, Missouri? (His mother-in-law owned it, and "never stopped ruminating, aloud and whenever possible in the presence of her son-in-law, about all the people who would have made better Presidents than Harry.... And don't track up the kitchen with your muddy feet, Harry.") "I carried the grips up to the attic."

Here was a hero who said things like "I just never got to thinking I was anything *special*." And "I'm just an old Missouri farmer." And "Everything, all of it, belongs to the people. I was just privileged to *use* it for a while. That's all . . . it was only *lent* to me, and by that I'm includin' the power of the Presidency." There was the time, for instance, when his military aide presented him with some transcripts of FBI phone taps left over from Franklin Roosevelt's time. He recalled himself responding with vituperation: "I haven't time for any such foolishness as that. Tell them I don't authorize any such thing."

"One's blood congeals at the thought of how far we have gone since those days," Miller wrote. "And it's been downhill all the way."

The fact that Truman, like FDR and JFK and LBJ, had also secretly recorded White House conversations was not then known—but people should have known better than to buy the idea of Truman as a reluctant wielder of presidential power: Harry S. Truman had made the most extraordinary extensions of executive authority in the history of the office, an entire new national security state, licensing many of the practices later associated with Joseph McCarthy. This had been documented in a bestseller from the previous year, Harvard historian Arthur Schlesinger's *The Imperial Presidency*, but the public forgot about that—and the fact that this supposed unblemished scourge of corruption was nicknamed an "Office Boy" of Kansas City's crooked boss Tom Prendergast, or that his estimate of how many American lives he had saved by dropping atomic bombs kept ballooning as the decades went by (in 1946 he said that several thousand American men would have died in an invasion of Japan; by 1959, he claimed the number was upwards of a million). Then Garry Wills, one of the deans of American journalism's suspicious circles, documented in *Esquire* that many of the dramatic instances of "plain speaking" Truman presented to Miller, such as his supposed public dressing down of General MacArthur, actually did not happen—and also that Truman was driven by much the same ego-damaged defects of character associated with Richard Nixon. Never mind. A grateful citizenry was glad to look the other way and savor the myth. Suspicious circles were being cowed into abatement everywhere. Nostalgia, heroes, and myth was the flavor of the month.

Heroes like soft-spoken Richard Vander Veen. On the plane to Washington for Vander Veen's congressional swearing-in, the captain sent his party a flight of champagne. The congressman-elect gave his first news conference: "The silent majority has spoken and its message is clear: Richard Nixon has failed us. Richard Nixon cannot lead us." It was picked up on all three networks. In a Florida paper, the news brief

below Vander Veen's words described the town of 1,200 in Washington State that had been without gasoline for a week, even for police cars; above that an AP wirephoto depicted motorists in an endless gas line looking on enviously as a family cruised by for their shopping trip in a horse and buggy. Things were still falling apart. That is why we needed heroes.

From Democrats Vander Veen got a standing ovation during his swearing-in ceremony for calling for impeachment. Republicans were simply shell-shocked. The new vice president, who found his coattails did not even extend to Grand Rapids, was reported to have muttered, "You can't mean that" at news of the election returns. Then, thinking fast, he told the press that the reason the Democrat won was "temporary turmoil" due to the energy crunch. RNC chair George H. W. Bush insisted Republicans still looked strong for 1974. At that, a conservative GOP congressman from Iowa literally leaped out of his sickbed and shouted at a reporter, "I'm damned sick and tired of the damned leadership of our party running around with their heads in the sand. They're a bunch of drunken optimists and if we don't face reality we'll lose fifty seats in November. We'll be having our Republican caucus in a phone booth."

The *Grand Rapids Press*, which endorsed the Republican as it always did, now editorialized, "As for our endorsement last week of Republican Robert VanderLann, the *Press* is eating crow . . . and it ain't that bad!"

And impeachment?

Once upon a time it had been the White House's favorite blunt instrument to shut people up about Watergate. As in: if you think Richard Nixon is so bad, then why don't you impeach him? It was such a drastic remedy, so historically discredited by the precedent of Andrew Johnson in 1868, that constitutional scholars dismissed it as unserious and unthinkable.

Not anymore.

The House had authorized $1.5 million to staff the Judiciary Committee inquiry. Late in 1973, the committee picked a lead investigator: John Doar, a Republican, because committee chairman Peter Rodino was obsessed with building a dispassionately nonpartisan inquiry. Doar had investigated civil rights crimes so thoroughly for Robert F. Kennedy's Justice Department that George Wallace once barked, "Someone should get a shotgun and blow Doar's head off." A week after the 1974 State of the Union address, the House voted 410 to 4 to give the Judiciary Committee broad power to subpoena anyone, including the president. And by spring Doar's staff of one hundred was working so thoroughly in their suite across the street from the Rayburn House Office Building that workmen had to reinforce the floor for all the extra file cabinets.

THEIR FIRST JOB WAS FIGURING OUT WHAT IMPEACHMENT WAS. A congressman had once argued on the floor of the House, concerning the attempt to unseat Supreme Court justice William O. Douglas, "The only honest answer is that an impeachable offense is whatever a majority of the House of Representatives considers to be at a given moment in history." But now that that congressman, Gerald Ford, had been chosen as Nixon's vice president, he apparently no longer believed this to be the case. Nixon said at a February 25 press conference, "You don't have to be a Constitutional lawyer to know that the Constitution is very precise in defining what is an impeachable offense." That definition, he said, was a serious criminal offense on the part of the president. In fact the Constitution could not be more vague. The Judiciary Committee's legal staff had just released a massively researched report arguing that the charter's reference to "high crimes and misdemeanors" was meant to encompass anything the House thought undermined the integrity of the office, disregarded constitutional duties, or violated the presidential oath of office—"a constitutional safety valve," as the report put it, which the Founders intended as "flexible enough to cope with exigencies" they couldn't have foreseen.

Many knowledgeable observers no longer thought even the lower standard would save Nixon. "Had he been a mafia associate," Joseph Kraft columnized, "he would have long since been tried and convicted and jailed just on the basis of the circumstantial evidence." There was also, as with the proverbial mafia prosecution, the question of *his* associates. The same day as the press conference, his personal attorney Herbert Kalmbach pleaded guilty to setting up fake political committees to launder Senate campaign contributions in 1970. (A *Los Angeles Times* cartoon: "I'd like to see my lawyer," Nixon says, to a jail guard, outside a cell marked "Kalmbach.") Four days later, the special prosecutor's office announced indictments including Haldeman, Ehrlichman, Mitchell, and Colson, on twenty-four counts of conspiracy, lying, and obstruction of justice. At Nixon's next live televised news conference, CBS's Dan Rather asked: "Would you consider the crimes returned in the indictments last week—those of perjury, obstruction of justice, and conspiracy—to be impeachable crimes if they did apply to you?" Taken aback at the harshest question in his career, the president fumbled

a cliché. "Well, I have also quit beating my wife," he said, to nervous laughter.

No wonder he was nervous. A charge in Haldeman's indictment for lying to Congress fired up that old question of what the president knew and when did he know it. John Dean had claimed that the president in March 1973 had asserted it would be no problem raising the million dollars in hush money. In *his* Senate testimony, however, Haldeman said he'd been there, too, and told the panel he later reviewed the tape, and confirmed that the president had actually said that it wouldn't be a practical problem to raise a million dollars for hush money, but that it "would be wrong"—meaning, unethical. TAPES CLEAR NIXON–HALDEMAN, was what the slugs had read on July 31, 1973. But what the headlines now revealed was that the Watergate grand jury had been allowed to listen to those tapes, too—and it was indicting Haldeman because Nixon had never said anything of the kind. It was the first practical confirmation of just how stunning these tapes could be for the very future of the republic. And the Judiciary Committee had just requested forty-two more.

The whole thing now was political: was it imaginable, whatever the evidence, that Congress would impeach? And, because Nixon was a consummate politician, these were the terms on which he was now fighting. He hemmed around his latest refusals to turn over evidence with a campaign-like slogan—"One year of Watergate is enough"—and a pointed set of metaphors to match: his tormenters were off on "a fishing expedition requiring 42 tapes and a U-Haul truck." Then he got out on the old campaign trail, below what one editorial wag called the "Mason-Nixon Line," where he might find the fifty to sixty Democratic congressmen he would need to save his ass.

ON MARCH 16, A YEAR AFTER NIXON HAD HOSTED MERLE HAGGARD AT the White House, Air Force One pulled into a National Guard hangar in Nashville, Tennessee, where an invited crowd waved little American flags to lyrics urging people to "stand up and cheer for Richard Nixon," set to the tune of "Okie from Muskogee." Thereupon, the president motorcaded to opening night of the Grand Ole Opry's new theater, where he banged out "Happy Birthday" and "My Wild Irish Rose" to his wife on the piano with a big red ersatz barn in the background, then goofed about with a yo-yo presented to him by "King of Country" Roy Acuff, who was resplendent in a stage costume of brilliant blue with snazzy silver piping.

The president repeated his favorite corny old joke about the mystic

powers of moonshine, which he'd been repeating on political sojourns in Dixie for years. Ignoring the man with the sign reading "He Ain't Country, He's Crooked," Nixon, looking clammy and awkward without a podium to protect him, pronounced, "Country music is America." Then, after a little yo-yo lesson from Acuff, he led the crowd in a booming rendition of "God Bless America."

Emboldened at a Houston question-and-answer session with the National Association of Broadcasters two days later, he made an extraordinary pledge of defiance to an impeachment inquiry he insisted was out of control: "I am suggesting the House follow the Constitution. If they do, I will."

The presidency, after all, was America. Richard Nixon was the president. The presidency must be preserved. So Richard Nixon had to be preserved. For the sake of America.

SENATOR JAMES BUCKLEY OF NEW YORK, THE NATION'S MOST PROMINENT conservative politician, did not agree. Two days after the president's return to Washington, Buckley gave a speech announcing, that Nixon's "credibility and moral authority" were "beyond repair," the presidency jeopardized "by a long, slow, agonizing, inch-by-inch process of attrition." So for the sake of the republic and the conservative mandate of 1972, he must voluntarily resign—as an "extraordinary act of statesmanship and courage."

Ronald Reagan answered Buckley an hour later at his regular Sacramento press conference. "I think all the evidence is to the contrary, including the fact that we are now going to get some oil from the Middle East." Impeachment had to be allowed to take its course, and would not disrupt the country: "I think there is something far more disruptive in establishing a precedent, if we ever do so, that by pressure alone the President can be forced to resign."

All winter Reagan had been framing the situation, as per usual, in terms maximally advantageous to the president. In Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, and Utah, he lambasted the "Eastern press establishment" for harassing a president so committed to patriotically preserving the future integrity of the office by *not* handing over documents to his prosecutors. Reagan pioneered, too, a critique of the supposed integrity of the Judiciary Committee investigation. In actuality, Rodino had been proceeding as fairly as humanly possible—so much so that he no longer even spoke back home in his New Jersey district: "They want a bellringer of a speech against Mr. Nixon," he said, "and I just can't give it." John Doar refused to hire any staffers who had ever expressed an opin-

ion about Watergate. Reagan's argument pressed the opposite case—that such labored deliberateness was corrupt: "I sometimes suspect the Rodino Committee," Reagan intimated darkly, "of trying to keep this thing going through this election year."

Soon the ranking minority member on the Judiciary Committee, Edward Hutchinson, was saying that, too. Then it became a right-wing refrain. But Reagan's newfound influence was not much boost for his national political prospects. Around the same time he began tongue-lashing the Judiciary Committee, he was also in the news as the first California governor in twenty-eight years to have a veto overridden. What he had vetoed was the legislature's attempts to block his plans to phase out the state's hospitals for the mentally ill and retarded. Oil, meanwhile, $2.70 a barrel in September 1973, was going for $13 now. The energy crisis flared with special intensity in California—where competitors in the Ontario 500 were granted just 200 gallons of fuel each for qualifying and 280 gallons for the race, and a plan went into effect restricting who could buy gas on what days based on whether their license plate ended with an odd or even number. Their governor blamed the problem on consumers—they were guilty of "panic buying."

Volunteers organized under the banner "People in Need" were hard at work fulfilling the SLA's demands to free Patty Hearst: distributing seventy dollars' worth of groceries to every Californian eligible for any form of public assistance and anyone who had ever been in prison or on parole. In some places, the distribution process descended into riots. Reagan, in Washington, D.C., for a governors' conference, was quoted by a reporter as saying at a fund-raising lunch, "Sometimes you wonder whether there shouldn't be an outbreak of botulism."

Baffling and bizarre, wishing botulism on poor people; reporters asked him to elaborate. He said it was a "joking remark"—much as he had said that his 1970 remark about student protesters, "If it's to be a bloodbath, let it be now," was a "figure of speech."

A *Los Angeles Times* reader noted, "Governor Reagan's remark about botulism will probably destroy him as a presidential candidate." But "even Republican governors must be allowed an occasional primal scream." Democrats in the state legislature piled on: "We have tried repeatedly to provide a program in which children could get through the school day without going hungry. Repeatedly the governor has vetoed these programs. . . . I hope the governor and his fat-cat Republican friends enjoyed their lunch." At that, Reagan blamed the newsman who reported his words for recklessly endangering Patty Hearst's life. "Frankly I think that he *was* as irresponsible as I have been *accused* of being."

THAT, FINALLY, WAS THE SMART PLAY. TO ATTACK THE MEDIA FROM THE right, and thereby to intimidate it into quiescence for fear of being accused of "liberal bias," was the new name of the game. One day in February, four of the erstwhile defendants from the notorious Chicago Seven trial, legendary 1960s radicals Jerry Rubin, Abbie Hoffman, Rennie Davis, and Tom Hayden, were scheduled to appear on Dick Cavett's talk show. The appointed evening arrived—and Cavett was replaced by a rerun, with no explanation. "ABC, as a broadcast licensee," a network spokesman eventually said, "has an obligation to insure fairness and balance in its programming in accordance with Federal Communications Commission requirements." This show as taped, the network said, had not been "balanced."

The cancellation was the fruit of a White House campaign of manipulation that began in 1969, when Nixon sent Spiro Agnew to attack news commentators as "a tiny and closed fraternity of privileged men, elected by no one." Behind the scenes, they assaulted the networks with threats—as revealed in several of the most revealing memos entered into evidence during the Ervin Committee hearings. In one, from September 1970, Charles Colson bragged of a meeting in which he warned network executives that unless the White House saw more "balanced coverage," TV stations would start losing broadcast licenses. "They are very much afraid of us," Colson reported, "and are trying hard to prove they are 'good guys.'"

Apparently they were even now—despite the president's maximal political weakness. Maybe having to report so many dastardly things about a Republican inspired network brass to proactively censor the left.

Of the Cavett episode, ABC singled out five areas in which the guests' opinions concerned it: on "the capitalist system, the administration, our system of justice and the courts, and U.S. foreign policy with regard to Vietnam and Cambodia." Cavett pronounced himself baffled. "If people eventually get to see the show," he said, "they won't be able to understand what the fuss was all about." They did eventually get to see it, heavily edited, five days after they got to see their president fondle a yo-yo at the Grand Ole Opry. They saw Jerry Rubin say that the real revolution lay in getting in touch with one's body and that when enough people did, capitalism would collapse. They saw Rennie Davis moon over his spiritual guru, the fifteen-year-old Maharaji Ji, and Abbie Hoffman say he'd been busy with "quiet things." Cavett, a little desperate to enliven the proceedings, asked what they would do if someone told them he or she was about to bomb a munitions plant. But only lip

readers would have been able to discern that Abbie Hoffman thought it would be much more productive these days to monkey-wrench an oil refinery office—because ABC smudged out the sound. Then two conservatives spoke for half an hour, because "under the terms of his contract," a network spokesman explained, Dick Cavett had "to provide an opposing viewpoint."

Soon after, Pat Buchanan, the right-wing White House staffer, began a column in the nation's most widely read magazine, *TV Guide*, which reached a third of the adult U.S. population every week. Buchanan was one of five rotating columnists penning a new feature called "News Watch." The others were the former editor of the Republican National Committee's magazine; Edith Efron, the author of a 1971 book alleging liberal media bias that the White House (in another Ervin Committee revelation) had bumped onto the bestseller list by secretly purchasing thousands of copies; Kevin Phillips, a former Nixon Justice Department staffer and author of *The Emerging Republican Majority*, now working on a project to break up the networks on antitrust grounds; and John P. Roche, who had once been the Johnson administration's liaison to the liberal intellectual community but now fit the description of a "neoconservative"—a newly popular coinage for conservatives who used to be liberal. *TV Guide* was published by Walter Annenberg, Nixon's former ambassador to the United Kingdom and a social companion of Ronald and Nancy Reagan.

It all reminded the *New Yorker* of another Buchanan memo flushed out by Watergate investigators, this one proposing that scholars at the "private" foundation he had proposed the White House set up as a political front group "produce a book of papers on [the media's] lack of objectivity and need for reform." There was, too, the case of William Safire, the White House speechwriter and former public relations agent whose specialty had been coming up with terms of abuse for the media to put in the mouth of Spiro Agnew. The *New York Times* gave him an op-ed column, which debuted in April: clever pieces in the acceptable argot of the Georgetown villagers that somehow always also ended up letting Richard Nixon elegantly off the hook—like the one in which he recommended "a public bonfire of the tapes on the White House lawn," but only, mind you, to "re-establish the confidentiality of the presidency."

These apparent successes chipping away at the media's supposed anti-Nixon bias were cold comfort for Nixon. The day after the Cavett show the Judiciary Committee won a major procedural battle when John Doar, melodramatically guarded by police, picked up what the

press called the "bulging briefcase"—a cache of evidence the special prosecutor insisted it would violate grand jury secrecy for Congress to see. Woodward and Bernstein of the *Post* reported it contained evidence that the president himself was involved in the cover-up. Judge Sirica ruled against Nixon after Rodino warned that without access to the documents, the impeachment inquiry would drag on for a year (and wasn't Nixon's latest slogan that "dragging out Watergate drags down America"?).

In April came the news that Nixon had paid $72,682.09 in taxes in 1969 but less than $800 in 1971—and got a $72,000 tax *refund* in 1970. The magic was due to a deduction received by donating his vice presidential papers to the government. Allegedly, he falsified the deed of gift to make it look like he donated them before the law under which he claimed the deduction expired. Now the IRS announced he owed the government $476,431, and that one year he had donated only $252 to charity. The *New York Times* banner on the subject was approximately as large as the one announcing the attack on Pearl Harbor. For the first time, a poll recorded a plurality, 43 to 41 percent, favoring impeachment.

On April 4, Judiciary Committee members reminded the White House they had waited thirty-eight days so far for a reply to their request for forty-two more tapes. One White House spokesman responded that the president was suffering under the yoke of a runaway prosecution seeking "carte blanche to rummage through every nook and cranny in the White House" and that this coequal branch of government was behaving "like a lot of children in homes all over the United States. When you are at meals and you want seconds, you have to clean your plate first." Another spokesman cried, "The mere fact of an impeachment inquiry does not give Congress the right to back up a truck and haul off White House files." Hotheads on the Judiciary Committee said that the White House was being criminally insolent, because the committee request had precisely designated which conversations they wanted and why, down to the minute. At that, Rodino made a public announcement: "We have been respectfully patient. The courts were patient. . . . The people have been patient for a long time. But the patience of this committee is wearing thin." He then granted the White House five more days, until April 9, to comply before this became the first House committee in history to subpoena a president.

The Saturday Night Massacre, with its visuals of agents of one branch of the government facing down another and its specter of a Strangelovian military takeover, had come last October 24. Now, a mere twenty-four weeks later, that same fear crept forth once more.

THEN THIS: AMID HEADLINES ABOUT THE NEW JUDICIARY COMMITTEE deadline and an announcement by the IRS that the president owed it almost a half million dollars, the SLA released a new tape featuring Patricia Hearst's voice.

"I would like to begin this statement by informing the public I wrote what I would like to say," she said. "I have never been forced to say anything on tape. Nor have I been brainwashed, drugged, tortured, hypnotized, or in any way confused." She went on to accuse her parents of being part of an FBI plot to assassinate both her and the people whom she now called her comrades. She had been given a choice, she said, of release or "joining the forces of the Symbionese Liberation Army and fighting for my freedom and the freedom of all oppressed people." She had chosen to join the SLA.

She ranted on and on: about how she learned that "the corporate ruling class will do anything in their power in order to maintain their position of control over the masses, even if this means the sacrifice of one of their own." That the food distribution had been "a sham"—this was obvious because "as members of the ruling class, I know for sure that yours and Mom's interests are never in the interests of the people." That if Randolph Hearst was interested in the people, he would have used his power to explain that the energy crisis was a conspiracy to reduce the labor force to "a small class of button pushers," and that "the law and order programs" of people like Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan were "just a means to remove so-called violent (meaning aware) individuals from the community in order to facilitate the controlled removal of unneeded labor force from this country, in the same way that Hitler controlled the removal of Jews from Germany." She concluded, "I should have known that if you and the rest of the corporate state were willing to do this to millions of people to maintain power and to serve your needs you would also kill me if necessary to serve those same needs." This was why, she went on to explain, she had shed the name Patty and chosen "Tania" instead—"after a comrade who fought alongside Che Guevara in Bolivia for the people of Bolivia. . . . It is in the spirit of Tania that I say, 'PATRIA O MUERTE. VENCEREMOS.'"

In case anyone missed the point, they enclosed a photograph of Hearst in a beret and a guerrilla uniform, posed as if firing a machine gun at a running dog of the fascist imperialists, a dreamy look on her face and the SLA's seven-headed serpent emblem in the background. "HEARST QUITS FAMILY," a headline read. Demons had possessed her. Who could say it would not happen to your children, too?

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Hank Aaron

SPRINGTIME, AND YOUNG MEN'S FANCIES TURNED TO THOUGHTS OF BASEball. Surely, this of all years called for a good old-fashioned heroic saga straight out of the days of Grantland Rice—and, as if on cue, on Opening Day, on the very first swing of his twenty-first season, Henry Aaron of the Atlanta Braves cracked a sinker that did not sink right on over the left-center wall at Riverfront Stadium in Cincinnati for the 714th home run of his career, tying the "unbeatable" record Babe Ruth had held since 1935.

In that same fortnight members of the Symbionese Liberation Army, including Patty Hearst, were seen on security cameras robbing Hibernia Bank in San Francisco with machine guns; also in San Francisco, two hitchhiking teenagers became the tenth and eleventh victims of a spree of random murders of white citizens by black men in what police labeled the "Zebra" shootings. In a single two-hour period, at least six F5 tornadoes formed, the worst "Super Outbreak" of storms in U.S. history. One destroyed half of Xenia, Ohio, in a space of minutes, killing thirty-four. Nationwide the storms covered thirteen states and left a path of destruction 2,500 miles long, killing three hundred.

Women reporters marched with picket signs outside the National Press Club, demonstrating against their exclusion from its annual Gridiron Dinner. Ronald Reagan vetoed all but $1 million from a $5 million bill to help unemployed veterans get jobs. Henry Kissinger went, hat in hand, before the United Nations, in the wake of the OPEC oil humiliation, to plea for the world's resource-rich Third World nations to share their resources more fairly with the formerly mighty United States. Excerpts of the new book by Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward about how they cracked Watergate, *All the President's Men*, ran in *Playboy*, where readers could also thumb through "The Devil Made Us Do It: A Ten Page Pictorial on the Occult." The Harris poll recorded that the public trusted the President of the United States less than the whistleblower John Dean.

And in the age of John Dean and Patty Hearst, it seemed, even sports could not provide uncomplicated pleasure.

Hank Aaron's day soured before it began. He was already haunted by the news from Xenia, Ohio, when the Cincinnati Reds front office asked how they could accommodate him on his special day. It was April 4—the sixth anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King. A black man and a civil rights supporter, Aaron asked that there be a moment of silence before the game. They refused. "I should have known better," he later reflected: Cincinnati was one of the most reactionary cities in the North. And for millions of white Americans, "Hammerin' Hank" represented not something beautiful given to them but something taken: their secure sense of racial supremacy in a world gone dangerously mad.

For a year now he had been getting letters like these:

Dear Nigger,

Everybody loved Babe Ruth. You will be the most hated man in this country if you break his career home run record.

Dear Jungle Bunny,

You may beat Ruth's record but there will always be one Babe. Go back to the jungles.

I hope you join brother Dr. Martin Luther King in that Heaven he spoke of.

His career had tracked the progress of integration in the major leagues: born poor near Mobile, Alabama (his dad found steady work for the first time thanks to President Roosevelt's executive order integrating war industries), inspired to become a major leaguer by Jackie Robinson, he was one of the last black stars to begin his career in the dying Negro Leagues. He was snapped up in 1952 by the Milwaukee Braves, and his first minor league stop was Eau Claire, Wisconsin, whose population included but seven blacks; he had never been inside a white person's home before. At his next, the Class A South Atlantic League, black players weren't allowed to argue the umpires' calls, and the best compliment Hank Aaron and his one black teammate ever got was "I just wanted to say that you niggers played a hell of a game." When he was in spring training the next year for the Braves, the Milwaukee papers nicknamed him "Stepin Fetchit."

But like in the words of the old Negro spiritual, he overcame—

leading the Braves to the 1957 World Series title, and winning individual titles for runs, RBIs, and home runs.

He did so quietly, modestly, an introvert in an extrovert's job. But he was also a rich black man—living, when the Braves moved to Atlanta the year Lester Maddox won the governorship after brandishing an ax handle to chase blacks from his restaurant, in the Deep South. By the time Aaron approached Babe Ruth's record, the heroic era of the civil rights movement, with its soaring images of melodramatic showdowns between vicious Southern sheriffs wielding clubs and humble warriors for justice wielding freedom songs, was over. It was replaced with something called "affirmative action": a bureaucratic, top-down attempt to compensate for past racial disadvantage by setting aside opportunities for blacks. Anger over that knew no regional bounds.

In Boston a cadre of liberals, including the congressman who was the former dean of the Boston College Law School, Father Robert Drinan, urged affirmative action for construction projects in their city, arguing, "If serious disorders break out in the near future, the Department of Labor can be cited as the proximate cause of such disorders." By 1974 a settlement was arrived at requiring 30 percent minority employment at sites in minority areas. The jobs were brokered through a "Third World Jobs Clearing House," supported by city funds, which soon was demanding a 50 percent share. Two thousand angry white Boston construction workers marched on City Hall. One told a reporter, "You been workin' ten to twelve years, some guy comes along from this Third World and grabs your job. What the hell?"

This noble attempt to redivide the economic pie, instituted by unelected judges, guilt-ridden bureaucrats, and litigation-shy corporate personnel officers, happened to go forward at a time when that pie was shrinking: in 1974—a year, to take one affirmative action milestone as an example, when the federal government's Equal Employment Opportunity Commission handed down a consent decree to both the nation's nine largest steel manufacturers and the United Steelworkers of America union, ordering hiring quotas for women and minorities. But this same year, unemployment hit its highest level since 1961. Inflation had quadrupled, and for the first time in a generation real take-home pay dropped. In that context the attempt to redress past inequalities seemed to whites to come one-for-one out of their hides.

In the culture at large, Hank Aaron absorbed the brunt of that sort of anger. Stealing Babe's pride of place, to his new pen pals he was like one of those black construction and steel workers who'd stolen theirs—just another swaggering black man empowered to lord it over whites as

if he owned the world. Soon, as one of them put it, "You boogies will think that you invented baseball or something."

In real life it didn't matter if Hank Aaron never swaggered. It was enough that he succeeded. On sports talk radio the argument was ubiquitous: he could not possibly have beaten a white man without sneaky unfair advantages, just like those affirmative-action hires: the baseballs he hit were more lively than the ones Ruth had to hit. He played in more games than Ruth. (The consensus seemed to be that Ruth would have hit 900 had the number of at-bats been equal, though the math became more creative in proportion to the racism: "Had Ruth played and been at bat as many times as you, old nigger, he would have hit just short of 1100 home runs.") Ballparks were smaller. ("Dear Nigger, you can hit all dem home runs over dem short fences, but you can't take dat black off your face.")

Were the claims of unfair advantage true? Not really. To cite another record, by the time his career ended in 1976 Aaron had hit for 722 more total bases than anyone else who had ever played the game—which had nothing to do with lively balls, tiny ballparks, or the number of games in a season. But stats were not driving this argument. The terror of racial displacement was. "I deplore the desecration of the memory and immortality of a great baseball player by extolling a modern pretender as 'the greatest,'" a Connecticut fan wrote as the death threats began coming daily, as if Jackie Robinson had never blazed the way at all. On days the FBI relayed to him a credible threat, Aaron politely informed his teammates not to stand too close to him in the dugout. One writer asked him to think of the children: Ruth "would do anything for a kid. . . . It is what is commonly known as a hero. Therefore, how could *you*, Mr. Aaron, ruin, destroy, and shatter to pieces the one record which separates Babe Ruth from any other man to play the great game of baseball?"

Aaron was certainly no hero in the city where Martin Luther King was buried. He drew ten thousand extra fans in any opposing ballpark he visited. He hit his 711th home run at home—and only 1,362 Atlantans showed up.

THE HOME RUN CHASE ALSO INDEXED AMERICA'S NEW PARANOIA, its weariness toward formerly trusted institutions, its new lack of respect for formerly taken-for-granted norms of decency. Before the 1973 season began, back when the POWs were coming home, the Braves' traveling secretary said publicly that the team hoped Aaron would break the record at home; then "we'll sell out every night." So every time Aaron struck out, fans accused him of doing it on purpose. Every time he sat on the bench, it was a scam. Then, as the 1974 season approached, when Braves owner Bill Bartholomay announced his intention to bench Aaron during the opening series in Cincinnati, the *New York Times* called it "a brazen defiance of baseball's integrity"—even though the practice was venerable and common. "Baseball's gone crooked," Dick Young of the *New York Daily News* wrote. "There is no delicate way of putting it. . . . I would feel slightly better, and so would the fans, if the Commissioner of Baseball had come out with a blistering order to the Braves that Hank Aaron must play the first three games, under threat of forfeit."

Came the big day in Cincinnati. Aaron blasted 714. He was, yes, promptly benched—and then, in the seventh inning, his moment in the sun was superseded when a young man ripped off his clothes and ran naked across the left-field upper deck for a full three minutes. He got two standing ovations, then signed a clutch of autographs as he was being taken away by police.

"Streaking" was the springtime's new fad: fifty Columbia University kids dashing nude through the streets of New York City; 2,500, a world record, through the campus of the University of Georgia; a female streaker at the University of Montana braving 30-degree temperatures—and, from the University of Pennsylvania, a "streak for impeachment" to encircle the White House was proposed. (A political cartoon showed a relieved President Nixon looking out a White House window: "Oh, it's only a streaker. For a moment there I thought you said leaker!") Right-wing North Carolina senator Jesse Helms seriously suggested "college authorities ought to take all the naked students into custody and herd them into a football stadium under guard and then require them to spend the night naked until their mothers come and request their release." He added, "It might be useful to hose down the streakers with cold water every 15 or 20 minutes." In Washington, the National Campaign to Impeach Nixon drew 6,500 for a raucous parade down Pennsylvania Avenue, five of them streaking through the line of march, past a Ford Edsel with the presidential seal on its side and an effigy of Nixon in a jail cell on the roof. And at the Academy Awards, just as David Niven was introducing Elizabeth Taylor to present the Best Picture award, to *The Sting*, a man named Robert Opel dashed across the stage to display what a quick-witted Niven called his "shortcomings." A streaker also raided the 1974 National Book Awards, crying "Read books! Read books!" (Then Adrienne Rich refused her poetry award—or rather, awarded it collectively to the two other female nominees,

Alice Walker and Audre Lorde, and to "all the women whose voices have gone and still go unheard in a patriarchal world." Allen Ginsberg sent up a friend who accepted his prize and shouted at the top of his lungs, "There is no longer any hope for the salvation of America!")

Later that season the Cleveland Indians offered beer for a dime a cup at a game against the Texas Rangers. There had already been a bench-clearing brawl between the two teams at a cheap-beer night in Arlington, Texas, a week earlier. Before this game, kids started setting off fireworks from their seats and the Texas manager Billy Martin tipped his cap and blew kisses to the booing crowd. In the second inning a hefty gal flashed her breasts on the on-deck circle and tried to kiss an umpire. In the fourth, a streaker slid into second base. In the fifth, a father and son mooned the outfield stands. By the sixth the fireworks were rocketing *into* the Texas dugout and fans started throwing golf balls, rocks, and batteries onto the field—and, following the seventh-inning stretch, they invaded the playing field, overwhelming security guards. In the ninth inning, when the home team tied the game at 5–5, a fan tried to celebrate by stealing the Rangers' star right fielder Jeff Burroughs's glove. The two got into a fistfight, and that was when the *real* riot began: Clevelanders armed with knives, chains, Chinese martial arts "nunchaku," and shards of seats they liberated from the stadium's concrete floor sent Texas players fleeing for their lives—but not before Martin, armed with a bat, led the rest of his team from the dugout to join the melee, crying "Let's get 'em boys!" like a demented Henry V recalling St. Crispin's Day.

Once upon a time, Grantland Rice said sports "help build up clean living, cool heads, stout hearts, and sound judgement under fire." Grantland Rice was long dead.

The night before Opening Day in Atlanta, the Braves' publicist was unable to sleep, terrified of what would happen if the off-duty cop who traveled everywhere with Aaron disguised as a fan, with a service revolver hidden away in a binocular case, plugged a streaker in the head. Aaron approached Los Angeles Dodgers pitcher Al Downing, the first black pitcher ever to start a Yankees World Series game, and handed him a note wishing him good luck. The encounter was soon the subject for racist conspiracy theories: two black men conspiring together to rob Babe Ruth of his glory.

Aaron's dad, seated for the game next to Governor Jimmy Carter, threw out the first ball. The second inning, the historic smack . . .

In New York, Frank Sinatra, opening a concert at Carnegie Hall: "To ease any tension in anybody's mind, Hank Aaron has hit the home run tonight." Sinatra had once been a man of the left. Now the former chairman of Democrats for Reagan in 1970 was much more a tribune of the sort of people who suspected any advance for blacks meant a reversal for whites. He said it without enthusiasm, to no more than polite applause. But Hank Aaron's response was anticlimactic as well: "Thank God it's over," he said when offered the microphone during the ceremony that interrupted the game. Then it started to rain, and for a moment it looked as if a cancellation would force the ordeal on him some other day. The ceremony ended. Half the crowd left. The president, too busy agonizing over his tapes to come to Atlanta, called only after Aaron had trotted out to right field. The call was accidentally disconnected before the hero made it back to the dugout.

THREE DAYS LATER, ON APRIL 11, THE HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE voted 33 to 3 to subpoena forty-two more taped conversations and gave the president two weeks to produce them. The next week Watergate special prosecutor Leon Jaworski requested a court order for sixty-four others—and then, the day after that, the Judiciary Committee asked for another 142. The president's lawyer James St. Clair requested one last extension to consider their response. By a vote of 34 to 4 the committee acceded to what Rodino called this "one *last* request"—that single word *last* veritably echoing across the marble walls.

Lawyer and president repaired to Camp David, and reached a historic decision. And night owls in Washington at 2:45 A.M. on April 29—about the hour when on a certain night in 1972 four Cubans were being arrested for burglary—could have spied several presidential employees rushing forth from 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue with typed manuscripts to the gloomy brick buildings where the 7,400 employees of the U.S. Government Printing Office impressed each day's *Congressional Record* into hot lead type on turn-of-the-century Linotype machines. They would soon be producing for the benefit of an eager nation a volume the size of a phone book with the portentous title *Submission of Recorded Presidential Conversations to the Committee on the Judiciary of the House of Representatives by President Nixon, April 30, 1974*. After that, the world would change.

It had been a year to the day since the president promised the nation, "There can be no whitewash in the White House." Now, his hair trimmed, his voice cool, his manner serene, he appeared on TV beside stack upon stack of blue volumes. "In these folders that you see over here on my left," he began, gesturing at the impressive array, "are more than twelve hundred pages of transcripts of private conversations I participated in between September 15, 1972 and April 27 of 1973. . . ."

(Skeptics soon pointed to the stagecraft: each book contained about twenty-five pages with wide margins and space between lines, making the release look much bigger than it actually was.)

"As far as what the President personally knew and did with regard to Watergate and the cover-up is concerned, these materials, together with those already made available, will tell it all. . . ."

(To those same skeptics that sounded like a hint he would resist further demands.)

"I have been reluctant to release these tapes, not just because they will embarrass me and those with whom I talked—which they will—and not just because they will become the object of speculation and even ridicule—and not just because certain parts of them will be seized upon by opportunistic opponents—which they will . . ."

(People just *had* to get their hands on these transcripts.)

"Because, in these and in all other conversations in this office, people have spoken their minds freely, never dreaming that specific sentences or even parts of sentences would be picked out as subjects of national attention and controversy."

He continued, to the point of tedium, with an elaborate and legalistic set of rationalizations, quoting the transcripts to explain why they precisely proved he had committed no crime, and no cover-up. For instance, he said the ones for March 21, the day concerning which John Dean had testified he had accepted the necessity of bribing defendants to perjure themselves, "show that I did not intend the further payment to Hunt or anyone else be made," that "by the end of the meeting, as the tape shows, my decision was to convene a new grand jury and to send everyone before the grand jury with instructions to testify."

He wound up after thirty-five minutes—the length of almost all his television speeches, the ideal length for a speech, he had long ago convinced himself—with sentimental bromides: that in an age when "peace may become possible in the Middle East for the first time in a generation," an age on the verge of "fulfilling the hope of mankind for a limitation on nuclear arms," there was "vital work to be done . . . so that Americans can enjoy what they have not had since 1956: full prosperity without war and without inflation. . . ."

(This was a retreat. He used to say the Americans already *had* full prosperity without war and without inflation.)

"[E]very day absorbed by Watergate is a day lost from the work that must be done by your President and by your Congress . . . the materials I make public tomorrow will provide all the additional evidence needed to get Watergate behind us and get it behind us now. Never before in the history of the presidency have records that are so private been made so public. In giving you these records—blemishes and all—I am placing my trust in the basic fairness of the American people . . . no questions remaining about the fact that the President has nothing to hide in this matter."

Then he wrapped up by quoting Lincoln.

IN THE YEARS TO COME AMERICANS WOULD LEARN IN A BLIZZARD OF bestselling books precisely the strategy behind this unexpected capitulation: he thought it would help cool the fires. Instead it was like a bomb going off—the biggest blunder of Nixon's political career.

To Mike Doonesbury, the titular alter ego of Garry Trudeau's house comic strip of the suspicious circles, what came out of his TV sounded like this.

Panel one: "Of course, different people will no doubt have very different interpretations of what was said—particularly at the so-called hush money meeting."

Panel two: "In this meeting, we discussed the options with great candor. First, we could have paid the money in the interests of national security. But we might have bled dry."

Panel three: "Or, we could have taken everyone with knowledge of the case out and shot them. But as a lawyer, I knew that would be wrong. No, we wanted to get the whole thing out in the *open*!"

Panel four: Doonesbury buries his head in his hands.

The volume was the size and heft of a phone book, 1,308 pages of transcripts. It became available to the public the next day at the low, low price of $12.25. But you didn't even have to read it to get the drift. Just look at the magazine racks. *Newsweek*, announcing a special section of twenty-two pages of excerpts, from a "transcript team" of fifteen, part of "the most extensive treatment of a breaking story in the magazine's history," put this bit of dialogue from the crucial March 21 conversation on the cover:

"D That's why for your immediate things you have no choice but to come up with the $120,000 or whatever it is."

"P Would you agree that that's the prime thing that you damn well better get done."

"D Obviously . . ."

"P (Expletive deleted) . . ."

Time's cover, "Nixon's Gamble," featured the following excerpts:

"Nobody is a friend of yours."
"You could get a million dollars."
"You can say, I can't recall."
"I say (expletive removed) don't hold anything back."

That morning, lines at the printing office stretched around the block. Its three thousand copies sold out in three hours. Everyone turned first to March 21, on the page stamped "187," where John Wesley Dean ("D") explained why hush money posed a legal problem: "One, Bob is involved in that; two, John is involved in that; I am involved in that; Mitchell is involved in that. And that is an obstruction of justice." He added that "the blackmail is continuing." He detailed the problem of *keeping* it continuing: "You have to wash the money. . . . People around here are not pros at this sort of thing. . . . This is the sort of thing Mafia people can do: washing money, getting clean money, and things like that. We just don't know about these things, because we are not criminals and not used to dealing in that business."

The president, eagerly interested, replied: "How much money do you need?"

Dean answered, "I would say these people are going to cost a million dollars over the next two years."

And then came the president's astonishing boast that the mafia had nothing on *him:* "You could get a million dollars. You could get it in cash. I know where it could be gotten. It is not easy, but it could be done. But the question is who the hell would handle it? Any ideas on that?"

This was the conversation the president insisted proved he had not participated in a cover-up.

United Press International clogged its wires for four days transmitting the 350,000 words to member newspapers, many of which published the whole thing as supplements, sometimes for free. The *Chicago Tribune* published its forty-four-page section within hours of the official release—a herculean effort involving three hundred staffers and a budget of $250,000. (Congressman Dan Rostenkowski said their account of how they did it "would make a wonderful movie.") National Public Radio hit the air with a marathon reading of every last word; CBS's ninety minutes of key scenes starred correspondents Bob Schieffer as John Dean, Barry Serafin as the president, and Nelson Benton as Bob Haldeman. Bantam Books and Dell Paperbacks released a combined

total of three million copies within a week; a bookstore owner called it his hottest-selling item since William Peter Blatty's *The Exorcist.* "We didn't realize the extent to which this book touched some kind of nerve in the American public," a publisher said. Neither did Richard Nixon.

Reporters soon realized how much of it was, simply, *off.* For example, 1,878 bits were designated as "inaudible" or "unintelligible"—and the president was inaudible twice as often as all other speakers combined, most often in conversations with Haldeman and Ehrlichman. Members of the public simply immersed themselves in the astonishing privilege of listening to these intimate moments of the powerful. To both, it soon became plain that the White House was a more sordid place than they had imagined. It wasn't the question of legal jeopardy that transfixed the country. It was the atmosphere the transcripts revealed.

The delight the participants took in what they got away with (infiltrating the Muskie campaign via an undercover secretary and chauffeur: "There is nothing illegal about that"). The endless intervals the president's men spent discussing how a principal might skillfully skirt perjury; the bizarre third-person grandiosity. A columnist for the *Hartford Courant* wrote: "They evince no concern for what might be the national interest, no idea of what might be right and what wrong. They just don't care. The only thing that bothered them was to keep secret as much as possible of the whole disaster." Speaking for multitudes, he concluded, "If the White House circle was innocent, why did they talk, over so many countless days and hours, just as though they were criminals?" The CEO of the United Presbyterian Church said it felt "almost as if the public had been admitted to the most private plotting within a felon's lair." Billy Graham literally vomited when he read it.

The sordidness emanated from the very language. The jock-macho talk ("game plan," "playing ball," "the big game"). The violence talk. ("Maybe someone will shoot him," followed by "Laughter." They were speaking of L. Patrick Gray, their nominee to head the FBI.) The martial talk, the enemies they saw as intent on seeing the president "bled to death." The new words, the mafia words: "absolute hang-out" (which meant telling the truth, which Nixon rejected); "modified hang-out" (which meant making it *look* as if you were telling the truth, which was the course they ultimately arrived at); the "stonewall" (a particularly favorite piece of jargon to the press, given how aptly it explained what reporters had been dealing with from Ron Ziegler for five years now).

And the fact that the president *swore* so damned much. That seemed to shock a blushing nation most of all.

The transcribers had left in some of the "hells" and "damns," though rarely from the president. With him, and where the language was saltier, the transcripts made an enduring contribution to American comic discourse: *expletive deleted.* This was the man who, during one of his debates with John F. Kennedy in 1960, soon after Harry Truman had said, "If you vote for Nixon you ought to go to hell," piously invoked "the tremendous number of children who come out to see the presidential candidates. It makes you realize that whoever is President is going to be a man that all the children of America will either look up to or will look down to, and I can only say that I am very proud that President Eisenhower restored dignity and decency and—frankly—good language to the conduct of the presidency." Now came the news that he swore worse than the little girl in *The Exorcist.* Then Seymour Hersh in the *New York Times* reported that in a Nixon-Dean conversation on February 28, 1973, the president made disparaging remarks about Jews and called Judge Sirica a "wop." The White House denied that any such language appeared on the tapes.

CBS's Eric Sevareid called the transcripts "a moral indictment without known precedent." Joseph Alsop recorded his "sheer flesh-crawling revulsion." At the annual Southern Baptist Convention, the pastor of a 4,300-member church in Columbia, South Carolina, told delegates that the transcripts were "one of the most pornographic, vulgar, and blasphemous documents" he'd ever read. (In his turn on the podium, Governor Carter of Georgia told his fellow Baptists they shared the blame: "There has never been an adequate role played by Christians in this nation... in shaping the standard and quality of public life.")

Republican officials were the most vituperative. Hugh Scott, the Senate minority leader, called it "deplorable, disgusting, shabby, immoral." Senator Robert Packwood lamented the lack of "even any token clichés about what is good for the people" A "Republican hierarch" told *Newsweek* he was "sickened" at having to "live with the fact that such a man is still in the White House." A Justice Department official pointed out that if this was the stuff Nixon was *forced* to release, in transcripts the White House provided, "Can you imagine what's in the stuff he's holding back?" William Safire wrote that the man who had rescued him from a public relations career and set him on a course as a *New York Times* columnist was "guilty of conduct unbecoming a president." However, Safire said he himself hoped the "personal humiliation" would save Nixon from those ravening for impeachment. This appeared unlikely, given that newspapers that had endorsed Nixon in 1968 and 1972 and now called for his removal included such Silent Majority standbys as

the Kansas City Times, Omaha World-Herald, Cleveland Plain Dealer, and Chicago Tribune, and even his hometown *Los Angeles Times,* which said, "Justice for the President and the nation now requires his impeachment."

Then the Judiciary Committee, flooded with telegrams saying things like "Impeach the (expletive deleted)," ruled in a 20–18 party-line vote that the transcripts did not fulfill the subpoena. John Doar said, "Quite candidly, these transcriptions are not accurate." A grand jury concluded of the March 21 tape that "Mr. Nixon would be indictable for obstruction of justice if he were not president." Congressman William Steiger, Republican from Wisconsin, said running for Congress as a Nixon supporter was "a prescription for suicide."

WILLIAM HEARST, UNCLE OF PATTY AND EDITOR OF THE NATION'S LARGEST newspaper chain, might have been excused for having other things on his mind. The U.S. attorney general, William Saxby, had just labeled the Symbionese Liberation Army part of an international criminal conspiracy, and stated that "based on her taped pronouncements Miss Hearst is part of it" and that the FBI would be willing to risk a shoot-out if it found where they were hiding—then he backed down, saying no action would be taken that would put Patty in jeopardy. (It indexed a debate that would rage for years: whether Patty Heart should be judged as responsible for her own actions. "Tania" herself weighed in without equivocation in the SLA's sixth taped communiqué, released on April 23, calling the idea she had been brainwashed "ridiculous to the point of being beyond belief.") Her uncle still found energy to speak of other taped voices—those of the president and aides, acting like a "gang of racketeers talking over strategy as they realize that the cops are closing in on them." He observed, "If any of the participants—ever—gave any consideration to what was right for the nation instead of themselves, then I must have missed it in the thousands of words I have waded through."

Which was not precisely true: they just spoke of the nation's interests as consubstantial with themselves. For instance, the time Haldeman told the president that Dean would never "sink low enough" to spill the beans, because "he's not anti-American and anti-Nixon."

In the middle of May, an SLA "combat unit" including Patty Hearst, resting in a motel near Disneyland after holding up a sporting goods store, watched live on TV as the FBI burned down a safe house holding six other SLA members, including their mysterious guru "Cinque." In other news, the president made plain he would not resign. Instead, as

the "Honk for Impeachment" movement reinfested Lafayette Park, he mounted a public relations tour. In Phoenix, there were 16,000 people and five hundred pounds of confetti. In Spokane, the day the House Judiciary Committee, behind closed doors, began debating impeachment, he cut the ribbon for Expo '74 before a crowd of 55,000 on the banks of the Spokane River—where "IMPEACH NIXON" banners unfurled as he motorcaded to the dais with Governor Daniel J. Evans, and he made a Freudian slip and mispronounced his host's name as "Governor Evidence."

Then he promised "to develop the great resources in this country that will not pollute the atmosphere." A protester shrieked back: "Clean up the White House first."

HIS ENEMIES, YES, WERE VICIOUS AND AMORAL. AND SO HE SENT FORTH determined armies of citizens to slay them.

Syndicated humorist Art Buchwald put out a column in mock sympathy for that army, a list of talking points ranging from "Everyone does it" (no. 1) to "What about Chappaquiddick?" (nos. 2, 9, 19, and 32) to "A President can't keep track of everything his staff does" (no. 3)—all the way up to no. 36: "If you say one more word about Watergate I'll punch you in the nose." Nixonites didn't need the favor. They said those same things on their own. Letters poured into the White House. One, from a restaurant owner, included a check for ten thousand dollars with instructions to the president to apply it to his back taxes. Tom Charles Huston was introduced to enthusiastic applause for an address to a symposium on "Government Surveillance of Private Citizens: Necessary or Ominous?" It was convened by the conservative youth group Young Americans for Freedom, or "YAF," of which he used to be president. He offered the audience an extraordinary statement of contrition for trying to set up a private spy outfit in the White House: "The risk of the remedy was as great as the disease. There was a willingness to accept without challenge the Executive's claim to increased power. That's why we acted as we did, and it was a mistake."

A middle-aged woman responded that it was anything but a mistake: "When a kid has got a knife stuck in your back, you don't set up a commission and call in the professors." By way of illustration, she went on to tell a story about the time her son had been harassed by bullies the cops wouldn't do anything about. So she sent him to school with a baseball bat: "Here, you handle that punk!" The room rocked with delighted applause. She said the bully's mother came to complain. "So you know what I do? I go at *her* with a baseball bat!" Huston, incredulous, unable

to get a word in edgewise, watched in horror from the podium as the cries went up: "Hooray for Liddy!" "Hooray for Watergate!"

A weekly White House "Defense Group" worked to amplify such voices. It was led by former Goldwater campaign official Dean Burch, a young communications staffer named Ken Clawson, and another young deputy assistant, Bruce Herschensohn, nicknamed "Dr. Happiness" for his relish for the job. Burch explained to the press, "What emerges from the transcripts is life as it is . . . in government and politics, life in industry and business—and yes, life in the editorial offices of every newspaper." Clawson riffed, "Those bastards can rip a single page out of the Bible and if they play it right they can make Jesus Christ sound like the devil," and called the impeachment drive "an attempted coup d'etat of the U.S. government."

Another defender was a grandiose and self-important Jesuit priest on the White House staff named John McLaughlin. The press office couldn't get any staffers to present the president's case before reporters. Father McLaughlin, though, volunteered. In a self-described "theological" analysis of the transcripts held for a gathering of reporters in Clawson's office, he said the tapes' foul language had "no moral meaning" but was instead a "form of emotional drainage" and "therapy"; he called claims of the conversations' amorality "erroneous, unjust" and described Nixon as "the greatest moral leader of the last third of this century." The priest was soon a celebrity, well-known for his luxurious pad at, of all places, the Watergate, and for the attractive young female aide from when he'd been an antiwar congressional candidate frequently seen on his arm. His religious superiors ordered him to leave the White House job for abusing his sacred calling. He left the priesthood instead.

Bruce Herschensohn was in charge of ringing up supporters—some of whom had sent literally cartons of supportive anti-impeachment petitions to the White House—and inviting them to the Oval Office. "I remember the tulips in bloom through the windows," gushed a housewife who personally delivered forty-eight thousand signatures to the commander in chief, paying her own way to Washington at Herschensohn's invitation on but a day's notice. And the president, she said, wore "one of the most direct 'I-don't-have-anything-to-hide' looks I've ever encountered."

The dean of the last-ditch supporters was a tiny retired Orthodox rabbi from Taunton, Massachusetts, named Baruch Korff. In the suspicious circles, he was fast becoming the tragedy's comic relief, rumbling in his borscht belt–comic Ukrainian accent that a great man's "blood has been sapped by vampires" and his body set upon by "vivisectionists . . .

unworthy of polishing his shoes." "This entire administration is being held captive by the *Washington Post*," he said. "I feel like I am in Hanoi and not in Washington." Full-page newspaper ads for his "National Citizens Committee for Fairness to the Presidency" denounced the "ASSASSINS" perpetrating this "RAPE OF AMERICA." He made endless rounds of media interviews: "If Nixon's guilty, then so were Johnson and Kennedy and Eisenhower and Truman. And, my God, could I tell you things about Roosevelt!" Fellow rabbis called him an embarrassment—"an apologist for rampant immorality," said the president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. So, according to *Time* magazine, did "some members of the President's inner circle." Not, though, the President of the United States. On May 13, he entertained Rabbi Korff in the Oval Office for a full ninety minutes.

CHAPTER TWELVE

"Here Comes the Pitch!"

RONALD REAGAN WAS ALSO A WATERGATE APOLOGIST—STILL. ASKED about the Oval Office tapes at his regular press conference, he replied, "I was struck by what appears to be a difference between some of the interpretation and the verbatim transcript"—which favored the president, he insisted—which "some commentators have left out."

He added, "I don't think anyone can make any judgment until they have read the entire 1,200 pages, the verbatim transcript, and not the interpretation of them"—which presupposed, since he was making a judgment, that he himself had read the thing (a week later he admitted he had read only two-thirds). So a reporter followed up, asking about the apparently incriminating things that *were* in the verbatim transcript. Reagan replied, cryptically, that commentators were ignoring "the flat statement by Dean to the President when he said, 'Mr. President, I know from my conversation that you were not aware of these things'"—a Reaganesque distortion of something rather different. What Dean actually said was "The reason I thought we ought to talk this morning is because in our conversations I have the impression that you don't know *everything* I know," upon which Dean told Nixon everything he knew—the precise evidence that Nixon was thereafter party to the cover-up. As usual, in those Reagan believed innocent, innocence was all he saw.

The governor was back in the network news on May 10 for the first time since the speculation over who would be Nixon's new vice president. He was introduced by NBC's weekend anchor Tom Brokaw as "one of the leading candidates for the Republican nomination." Brokaw then threw to reporter Tom Pettit at one of the sixty-three-year-old governor's old stomping grounds: the Drake Relays, which he used to cover for a sportscaster on the radio in Des Moines, in the state whose early nominating caucuses were newly influential in deciding presidential nominations.

"No other presidential prospect has his experience," Pettit narrated

over a jaunty snapshot of a young self-dramatizing Ronald Reagan holding one of the pipes he liked to collect back then: "Reagan was in his early twenties when he broadcast over 600 Major League baseball games without ever going to the ballpark."

RETURN TO 1932. THE ADVENTURE OF RONALD REAGAN, SPORTSCASTER, had begun shortly after college graduation: another summer on his lifeguard perch, then Labor Day and the close of the swimming season—and the harrowing possibility of Depression-era unemployment. There was an opening in the sporting goods department at Montgomery Ward. The position went instead to a high school basketball star. "If I'd gotten the job I wanted at Montgomery Ward," related his postpresidential memoir *An American Life*, "I suppose I never would have left Illinois."

However, that story contradicted one told in his other memoir, in which he had said he had already determined to make himself a star.

The previous summer he succeeded in causing an older male mentor to take a shine to him—one of his lifelong patterns. An out-of-town businessman named Sid Altschuler asked Dutch about his career plans. He said that he didn't know what he wanted to do, though he actually did: after winning an award for his performance at a theater festival at Northwestern University, Dutch had decided once and for all that he wanted to be an actor. But in 1932 in a small town back in the Midwest, you didn't say out loud to someone that you wanted to be an actor. "So I told him that I had thought about radio and being a sports announcer."

Reagan's account has Altschuler advising Dutch in Babbittish can-do argot: hit the road, cold-call radio stations one by one, pitch himself as a bright-eyed enthusiast so excited about the future of radio "I would take any kind of job simply to get inside the station." That pitch he would have been able to make quite sincerely. In Reagan's accounts of his childhood, his mentions of a passion for the movies are rare—but he was always a fanatic for radio.

There was the time his brother tried to build their own radio set and managed to blow out all the circuits in the house. There was the crystal set at his mother's family's farm: "I remember sitting with a dozen others in a little room with breathless attention, a pair of earphones attached tightly to my head, scratching a crystal wire. I was listening to raspy recorded music and faint voices saying, 'This is KDKA, Pittsburgh, KDKA, Pittsburgh.'" The brand-new medium, before the rise of the national networks, was an entertainment Wild West—a surreal farrago of fundamentalist preaching, gutbucket jazz, hog-calling contests, old-time fiddling, advertising jingles sung by groups with names like "the

Cornfield Canaries" and "the Seed House Girls," and political snake-oil peddlers like "Baker the Great Emancipator," who did battle with a submachine gun by his side lest the "financial octopi" come after him in his studio. One of the most popular radio acts of 1924 was an orchestra of jailbirds led by a convicted armed robber that performed weekly under guard in a studio beneath the capitol dome in Jefferson City, Missouri. Because the airwaves were so uncluttered, the most meager signal could reach nearly nationwide, much to the disgust of aesthetes like the man who wrote to Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover aghast that this "most thrilling achievement of modern science" was being "prostituted" to "bad English" and "cheap jazz" and "advertising of doubtful resorts and speakeasies to such an extent to be a source of common disgust."

Dutch loved it. It was one of the ways the Boy Who Disappears came into himself. The first time he heard that crystal radio set, he ventriloquized the announcer, to the delight of his family, who made him do it again and again; in high school he broadcast basketball games; in slow moments at the Lowell Park Beach he deployed a photographic memory to recount the weekend's football games in a rapid-fire staccato.

So he stuck out his thumb and hitchhiked to Chicago. He said he hid the plan from his father because of the daily announcements over the radio "urging people not to leave home looking for work because there was none." Historians of the New Deal say there were no such announcements. That detail, however, did set up a melodramatic tale of redemption.

On his first trip, after striking out at four radio stations, the story went, he was advised at the fifth to try out in the "sticks." He hitchhiked shamefacedly back to Dixon, accompanied, in his recollection, by a melodramatic thunderstorm. Jack offered him the dilapidated family Oldsmobile to scout the surrounding towns. The first station he alighted on was WOC in Davenport, Iowa, where an employee told him to go away, because the station had just hired someone else.

"How does anyone get a chance as a sports announcer if you can't even get a job in a radio station?"

"*Not so fast, ye big bastard, didn't ye hear me callin' ye? Do ye perhaps know football?*"

(The story's melodramatic turning point, when everything hung in suspense.)

It was the Scottish station manager, who rapped him on the shin with his picturesque cane and demanded, "Do ye think ye could tell me about a game and make me see it?"

He had been preparing all his life as if for exactly that. He described

the last quarter of a game between Eureka and Western State in which the good guys won in the final twenty seconds with a sixty-five-yard touchdown run. There were "long, blue shadows settling over the field." There was a "chill wind coming in through the end of the stadium." There were—lots more details, unspooled for a full fifteen minutes with such sweaty aplomb that he was offered on the spot bus fare to Iowa City to share a tryout with a more experienced broadcaster at a real game. There, in the third quarter, his legend went, the station manager scrawled a message: "Let the kid finish the game."

Now he was a professional sportscaster—soon praised by a Davenport paper for "a crisp account of [a] muddy struggle [that] sounded like a carefully written story . . . his quick tongue . . . as fast as the plays."

Next he was transferred at a hundred dollars a week to the much bigger Des Moines affiliate, a 50,000-watt clear channel station audible in forty-four states and five Canadian provinces at night. It made "Dutch" Reagan—the only name by which anyone there ever knew him—a celebrity in farm towns across the Midwest.

More than ever, his very life became a performance. In descriptions from those who knew him, words recur like "dashing," and "blade." And "rakish": how he combed his hair, and wore his hats tipped to the left, and—after he took over announcement duties for a show sponsored by the Kentucky Club Pipe Tobacco Company—for the pipes that he was rarely photographed without, but which he never lit. He also, a friend recalls, had a way of "holding a slightly receding posture so that people often had to lean toward him to hear what he was saying (a manner that created an almost instant sense of intimacy)."

He became a frequent dinner speaker at events outside Des Moines (at father-son dinners, *Frank Merriwell at Yale*–style, he would exhort boys against "drink, cigarettes, and cheating"). And after his high school and college sweetheart Mugs Cleaver, the minister's daughter, decamped for a year in France, he became Des Moines's most eligible bachelor—at Club Belvedere, the town's one genuine night spot; and at Cy's Moonlight Inn, home of the city's first jukebox, and a dimly lit dance floor known as the "passion pit." "Next to spiked beer," someone said, "Reagan was the Moonlight's top attraction." When he was headed there after a broadcast shift he'd alert his entourage, which included much of the coaching staff at Drake (like Eureka, a Disciples of Christ school) in a special code. A light drinker, he was the designated driver; a hail-fellow-well-met, he also liked to buy beer for underage guys. He was ever alert to ways of placing others in the hero's debt.

Another stage setting was the public pool at Fort Dodge, a massive

thing that supposedly held three thousand bathers; arriving, he would wave to admirers like a politician working a crowd. He bought his first car, a convertible two-seater Nash Lafayette, one of the first off the line, with a striking metallic brown finish. He loved to gun the motor and keep the top down, even in inclement weather—quite a show in the middle of a depression. But depressions could be occasions for demonstrative heroics, too. Thrilled by the way Franklin Roosevelt had sparked the nation back to life on the radio, Dutch developed an accomplished imitation, complete with dramatic waves of the imaginary cigarette holder.

He developed another stage for his performance of personality as well. He had, he admitted, "no particular desire to be an officer," holding to the fashionable opinion that America had already fought the "war to end all wars"—but he joined the cavalry regiment stationed at Fort Dodge nonetheless, because he was willing to do just about anything to get astride a horse. Luckily, the regiment didn't seem to notice that even after he matriculated in the equestrian course he kept on delaying the application process: it required an eye examination. (When the day for the eye test finally arrived, he cheated.) He especially liked his cavalry uniform's riding breeches. Sometimes he wore them to work, especially when interviewing celebrities. "All he ever wanted to talk about was horses," a professional gambler who owned stallions remembered of their conversations at Club Belvedere.

Just like in college, he was again master of all he surveyed—a perfectly calibrated persona. He somehow always managed to throw himself in the way of opportunities for demonstrative heroics—like the time when, his window open on a hot night, he heard a scream, saw a nurse in her white uniform fighting off an attacker, and grabbed a .45 automatic he kept on his mantel and aimed it out the window. The blade, as he himself told the story, for instance to the editors of *Sports Afield* in 1984, cried, "Leave her alone or I'll shoot you right between the shoulders!" Then he dashed down in pajamas and saw the damsel in distress to her destination. "He was so strong-sounding in his command," she recalled, "that the robber believed his gun was loaded—and so did I." He never invited anyone to his modest apartment in a run-down neighborhood—but did invite people when he moved into a ground-floor flat that used to be the sitting room of a sumptuous Victorian house, a more suitable stage.

Simultaneously acquiring the company of VIPs and maintaining an image as an ordinary guy, always making others feel good in his presence: here was the most exquisitely cultivated skill of the Boy Who

Disappears. The reviews were sterling—mostly. "He was always just one of the guys, never stuck up," a Drake football star and drinking buddy remembered. However, as ever, there were suspicious circles. Dutch bragged so often to a lifeguard at Camp Dodge about his heroics at Lowell Park that the lifeguard started searching for discrepancies. "Some just got a push," he came away concluding. "He had a good imagination." A girlfriend remembered, "I always had the feeling that I was with him but he wasn't with me. He was always looking over his shoulder, scanning the crowd. I'd say he was a born politician, courting important people, favoring good will—wanting it." Some found him a hero, and followed him; others thought him a ludicrous sham. It would ever be thus.

Back home the Depression had brought Jack Reagan to the direst of straits. The first job he could get when the Fashion Book Shop disappeared was at the Dixon State Hospital, where Nelle volunteered. The family sublet all but one room in their apartment. A succession of traveling sales jobs culminated at a seedy shoe store 170 miles away. Roosevelt's New Deal saved him: he got a job with the Works Progress Administration, distributing food and scrip to his fellow down-and-outers—many of them his former social superiors. He was happy. He stopped abusing alcohol. A Reagan biographer thinks these "days of government employment were, perhaps, the finest of his life, more exciting and fulfilling than any previous experience. The desperation and hope had helped him discover a capacity to fight for others as well as himself." His youngest son may well have agreed. Like his father, he had always been a Democrat.

At college, as college students tend to do, Reagan had planted his flag further to the left. Eureka had been founded by abolitionists. The grandchildren of abolitionists dominated it now, recruiting black students, pushing women's suffrage, dedicated to changing the world (even if dancing between the sexes was forbidden). Its faculty was full of radicals—including a teacher recruited from a Duluth, Minnesota, college run by the Industrial Workers of the World where the required texts included Marx's *Das Kapital* and Engels's *The Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State,* and which an investigating committee of the New York legislature called the "mainstay of Finnish radicalism in this country."

Reagan was very much a part of this political culture—more than the school's Christian culture (one year he got a D in religion class). "He was a liberal," a religion professor remembered, "almost a socialist when he was here." His favorite professor, Alexander Charles Gray, was

a former Disciples minister who became a socialist economist; Reagan called him "Daddy Gray" and took seven courses from him. One former student of Gray's founded the Southern Tenant Farmers Union in 1934, one of the few agricultural unions of the time and practically the only Southern institution that was racially integrated; another founded the Highlander Folk School, where the song "We Shall Overcome" was composed. In 1933, the year after Reagan's graduation, 877 showed up on campus to hear socialist leader Norman Thomas. There were 250 students at Eureka at the time; one-third of them belonged to the Intercollegiate Socialist Society.

Then, in Des Moines, he was exposed to other ways of seeing the world. His next surrogate father was the station's news director, H. R. "Charlie" Gross, the "fastest tongue in the business." Gross was a dyed-in-the-wool reactionary, gifted at depicting federal spending as a colorful theater of the absurd. Reagan boldly tried to sell him on the New Deal in lunch-counter debates—rigidly holding to positions, like Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace's program to pay farmers to kill pigs, that he privately considered absurd himself. What Gross's ripostes might have consisted of is suggested by the speeches he gave decades later as one of the most conservative members of the United States Congress: against Medicare ("I'm simply trying to save this country from bankruptcy"); against foreign aid ("I don't care whether you describe it in English, Latin, or Pig Latin"); against federal funding of rodent control in the slums ("How many children are bitten by squirrels that they feed and try to handle? On the basis of that, does anyone suggest a program to exterminate squirrels?"); the National Endowment for the Arts (grants "for the study of the tune Nero played as Rome burned")—and especially, that "Tower of Babel, the United Nations."

Dutch held Charlie Gross in awe, whatever their ideological differences. Gross was the only person he never swore around, the only colleague he consistently addressed as "Sir." "Somewhere around the last months of Dutch's employment at WHO," a colleague remembered, "I recall thinking that maybe Gross was winning him over."

Meanwhile, Reagan's regional fame grew apace. He wrote an "inside dope" sports column in the *Des Moines Dispatch,* aping Grantland Rice's purple prose (the Sugar Bowl was the "Saccharin Saucer") and soppy moralism: "Mr. and Mrs. Public shell out to see the Old College try," he wrote of a fight between Joe Louis and Bob Pastor he thought obviously fixed (no matter that the facts were not clear), not "sporting mud holes like the Black Sox Scandal." Most famously, he did play-by-play of the games of the Chicago Cubs. In an age before jet travel, the

relevant technologies were a telegraph and a typewriter: a witness present at the game would relay the on-field goings-on to Des Moines in Morse code, and a clerk in the studio would type out the action on slips of paper and pass them through a slit in the soundproof wall to Ronald Reagan, who'd fill in the rest with his imagination while working a foot pedal to amplify and attenuate canned crowd applause. He got so good at it that he toured around delivering the show in person, including at the chapel at Eureka College and the Iowa State Fair.

Thus the skill that landed him, some four decades later, one spring day six weeks after Henry Aaron broke Babe Ruth's home run record, in a lavish feature on *NBC Nightly News*, calling the nation back to those simpler bygone days of Grantland Rice. In this sordid spring of 1974, it was just of the sort of nostalgia a traumatized nation was desperate to lap up.

NEWS CAME THAT THE HOMICIDAL GANG WHO HAD SWALLOWED UP PATTY Hearst included the former social chair of Chi Omega at Indiana University, a high school golfer and scion of an Episcopalian building supply family in Indianapolis, and a cute and perky former cheerleader and Sunday school teacher and Goldwater girl from Santa Rosa. In the sporting news, pitcher Dock Ellis of the Pittsburgh Pirates attempted to bean every batter in the Reds lineup in retaliation for a run-in two years earlier with a racist Cincinnati security guard. The May 10 newscast on NBC began with speculation on whether a rare face-to-face meeting between Vice President Ford and the president had included talk of presidential succession; it then segued to G. Gordon Liddy's conviction for contempt of Congress; then to the latest leak from the impeachment hearings that the president probably knew about the April 1972 meeting in the attorney general's office where Liddy proposed his "Operation Gemstone"—then to fears of a housing market collapse, news that a federal judge had ruled William Calley, the perpetrator of the My Lai Massacre, could remain free on bail, and a report on how colleges and universities across the country were running out of money.

Then came genial Ronald Reagan, regaling a giant Drake Relays audience with the story of how he did Cubs play-by-play:

"So you'd say, 'Here comes the pitch!' and . . ."

("He worked from very brief telegraphic descriptions which had to be typed up for every play of the game. . . .")

". . . now at this point you wait for the typewriter again and you say that 'there's a stall'—and if he doesn't start typing you say he's waved off the sign, wiped his hand on the rosin bag . . ."

(Pan to a sepia-toned shot of dashing Dutch at the microphone in trench coat, tie, and rakishly angled hat.)

And then, at jackrabbit speed, mounting in rhythm and intensity, his audience pulled in deeper and deeper—

". . . thereitgoesahardhitgroundballsecondbasemangoveroverafter-theballmakesaonehandstabgrabstheballalmostfallingdownthrowsit *just in time for the out!!*"

Then the country heard for the first of many times the tale about the time he had Dizzy Dean pitching against Billy Jurges (though in other tellings the batter was Augie Galan), and the telegraph machine malfunctioned: "I looked at Curly and Curly looked at me and I just *couldn't* say that to the audience, 'We've lost our service, we're going to have a brief interlude of transcribed music.'"

He laughed: "So I said, 'Diz Dean'—I slowed him down a lot, had him use the rosin bag, had him shake off signs, lengthy windup—'finally lets go with the other pitch.' And he fouled that one off to the right. Then he fouled one back to the stands! Then he fouled one off back of third base and I described two kids trying to get the ball. Then he fouled one off that just missed a home run by a foot—until *finally*, in the nick of time, Curly sat up, started typing, and I started another ball on the way to the plate, grabbed the wire, and said—'Jurges popped out on the first ball pitched.'"

As the laughter billowed he thanked his audience and stepped down. That old trouper's rule: always leave 'em laughing when you say goodbye.

THE IDEA OF A REAGAN PRESIDENTIAL BOOMLET, THOUGH, SEEMED hardly to last longer than a pop fly on the first ball pitched. "To the dismay of his political handlers," Washington dopesters Rowland Evans and Robert Novak wrote in their "Inside Report" column a few weeks later, "Ronald Reagan is no closer to a polite but clear break with President Nixon than he was a year ago and continues to resist that politically necessary rupture even as he prepares to run for President." The columnists were frankly astonished: "During a one-hour interview with us in his state capitol office, Reagan uttered not one discouraging word about Mr. Nixon." The political architects of his presidential run, they reported, "meeting secretly and regularly"—who having "watched plain, dull Jerry Ford in action, are confident their man can win"—were anguished at what they called their man's stubborn "Christian charity toward a fallen political comrade." In an interview, Reagan lectured Washington's most influential columnists, saying that he found no

evidence of criminal activity—which was why, he said, Nixon's detractors were training their fire on "vague areas like morality and so forth." *Expletives deleted* did not dismay him; he made of them, in fact, a virtue: "I've had some meetings in this office when I've been enraged at the legislature that I would not have wanted my mother to hear!"

Evans and Novak concluded, "For such 'Christian charity' Reagan pays a price": in polls of California Republicans regarding a theoretical head-to-head matchup with Gerald Ford for the Republican nomination, in a state where Nixon's approval rating was but 18 percent, Reagan was down 7 points since November. Still he stuck to his guns: asked about Evans and Novak's column in his next press conference, he said that they may have "stretched it a little bit," but that he still presumed Nixon to be an unfairly harassed innocent.

No one seemed impressed with Ronald Reagan. At NBC News the reporter had signed off from Des Moines with the jape, "Sportscasting is clearly good training for politics. You learn the fine art of speaking with conviction—even when you don't know what you're talking about." Anchor Brokaw, unable to help himself, grinned from ear to ear. Reagan did not appear again on a national newscast until June 19, in a mocking CBS item on his success turning graffiti into a criminal offense carrying a five-hundred-dollar fine. He did not show up after that until October. Ronald Reagan might be charming, but Richard Milhous Nixon would require more credible defenders than this.

A STRIKE BY TEN THOUSAND MUNICIPAL WORKERS IN SAN FRANCISCO reduced hospital patients to two meals a day, served on paper plates, and diabetics got no special meals; transportation was paralyzed; hundreds of millions of tons of raw sewage surged into the world's most beautiful bay. A school strike in tiny Hortonville, Wisconsin, made *Time* magazine for the vociferousness of the passions it raised: a "teacher" hung in effigy from the local water tower by a gang of local toughs who designated themselves "The Vigilantes"; school board members finding *Playboy* magazine subscriptions they hadn't ordered showing up in their mailboxes and being woken up by harassing phone calls at 3 A.M.; a strike critic discovering his favorite hunting beagle hanged to death on his front porch on its own chain.

And meanwhile on the funny pages, Garry Trudeau followed a series of strips about oil barons reveling in the record profits with ones of congressmen agonizing in poker-game colloquies about how they might vote on impeachment.

Even conservative Republicans were on the fence—like Congressman Hamilton Fish Jr., a Judiciary Committee member from a New York district that was fifty-fifty for impeachment. What had tipped the scales for *him* toward impeachment was a constituent's letter reading, "Is Mr. Nixon utterly amoral? Or does he know the difference between right and wrong, but firmly believes that a lie repeated often and loudly enough *can* fool all of the people all of the time?"

Impeachment hearings had begun behind closed doors in the Rayburn Office Building. Twenty-one Democrats and seventeen Republicans sat earnestly on a two-tiered mahogany dais beneath stately portraits of illustrious predecessors from a Judiciary Committee that had only recently been a very different sort of body: a redoubt of backbench conservatives, a sleepy graveyard for progressive legislation. By the late 1960s, though, it suddenly found itself the white-hot center of all the most interesting issues, from open housing to criminal jurisprudence to privacy rights. Fresh-faced young liberals soon clamored to join; now more than half the membership was under fifty. Eleven were freshmen, and blacks and women were represented far out of proportion with their number in the rest of the House. "These aren't Southern gentlemen like Sam Ervin," a Republican member warned his caucus. "These guys are out for blood."

Chairman Rodino and his deputy John Doar determinedly refused to give it to them. Doar began his evidentiary presentation on May 9 in numbing chronological order, "with a level of precision," Jimmy Breslin wrote, "that approached life." His drone was interrupted by intervals in which members listened, using earphones clamped to their heads, to Oval Office conversations so contextless and of such poor audio quality that they often ended up more perplexed than when they began.

And since the hearings' very first vote had been to clear the room of both spectators and cameras, and had been accompanied by members' pledges to keep what happened behind those closed doors to themselves, reporters would lurk for hours on end in the marble corridors for those precious moments when a quorum call, lunch, or closing gavel sounded like a starting gun—when, as the *New York Times*' Anthony Lukas described the spectacle, "eighty to a hundred reporters thundered down the hallway after their favorites, begging for a scrap of data." One freshman Republican, New Jersey's Joseph Maraziti, dashed so quickly every evening in order to get on front pages proclaiming the president's innocence, he earned the nickname "Streaker." Liberals rushed to launder the opposite impression. What ended up running on the front page frequently revealed nothing useful at all. For instance, the day early in June when the *New York Times* headline NIXON TAPE IS SAID TO LINK